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# The Wee Widow's Cruise in Quiet Waters

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# The Wee Widow's Cruise in Quiet Waters

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BY

"AN IDLE EXILE"

*Author of "In Tent and Bungalow," "Indian Idyls," "By a Himalayan Lake," etc.*

[E. E. Cuthell]

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# The Wee Widow's Cruise in Quiet Waters.

## CHAPTER I.

### AT COWES.

"I'M a-weary of all this!" exclaimed the Wee Widow, leaning far back in her low wicker chair, and clasping her little hands behind her head, where the coils of her fair hair were twisted under her sailor hat, on the ribbon of which was emblazoned the red and white burgee of the Royal Yacht Squadron.

"Ditto!" murmured Dickie, as if too lazy for words, and she stifled a yawn in a half-hearted manner.

The scene was the deck of the 200-ton steam yacht *Débonnaire*, R. Y. S.; the hour, that lazy time after lunch

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when the men smoke under the awning; the time, the end of the "Cowes Week."

At midnight the evening before the fireworks had ended. To-day, the pandemonium of the Town Regatta had given place to comparative quiet. The empty Green was littered with the bun bags of the trippers, and up and down the steep and narrow streets of the little town, heavily-laden flies with luggage toiled to station and to pier. Already, in the long line of yachts, three deep, which stretched almost across the mouth of the Medina from Egypt to Old Castle Point, where the Royal Standard waved among the Osborne woods, there were one or two gaps. By to-morrow the racing fleet would have moved on to off Ryde pier, and the yellow funneled Royal Yacht would have vanished from her moorings in the middle of the line, and carried off her illustrious passengers *en route* for Copenhagen and Homburg. Another week, and Cowes would be practically deserted till the following August.

"One's done the same thing over and over again, year after year, till one's sick of it!" the Wee Widow

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went on, no one taking up her grumble. "Yes, you're a dear old chap, Arthur, and your *Débonnaire* is as delightful to stay in as the Abbey, or Glendrowsie, or 'La Folie,' at St. Raphael, or any other of the many places you call 'home.' But I want a new sensation, that's it!"

"Back a woman for grumbling, any day," muttered Lord Arthur, in an elder-brotherly tone, removing his cigar from his mouth for a minute or two. "Really, I should have thought that, as you have been driving about the London streets in and out of people's houses for half the night ever since the Derby time, you'd be thankful for a rest at sea, and for good nights, with the breeze blowing down through the skylight."

"So we are!" cried both women at once, quite energetically. "We are always happy at sea, but we want a change—*toujours* Cowes, Ryde, Weymouth," added the Wee Widow.

"With a run over to Dieppe for the races, and Trouville," put in Dickie.

"And Dartmouth or Oban Regatta to wind up with. The same moorings, the same club-houses, the same yachts with the same people! And

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good old Knight bossing the show, and taking the old *Débonnaire* about, in much the same way as mamma's fat old coachman drove the big carriage."

"You're ungrateful girls," said Lady Arthur, "and we won't take you cruising never no more," she laughed.

Her husband removed his cigar again, and pointed with it to a grimy Pickford's tug.

"Why don't you ship before the mast on that, and get a change?" he suggested. "I'll give you a character for steering and knowledgeableness of the sea."

"Or we might go as stewardesses to America in *that*," put in Dickie, and she waved at a large black-hulled North German Lloyd bound from Bremen to New York, which was making the August afternoon hideous by whistling lugubriously off Calshot Point for the tug with its Southampton passengers. "We're 'never, *never*,' etc., etc.," she added.

"But, seriously, and in good earnest," said the Wee Widow, "it would be just lovely to have a little yacht, just Dickie and I, and cruise about all sorts of strange places."

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"And be lost?" put in Lady Arthur.

"Oh! we'd have a crew, you know, and then we know a good deal about sailing."

"And the crew would get tipsy, or else masterful, and we should be no more our own mistresses than you are on the *Débonnaire*, with old Knight as captain."

"But need we have much crew, just for a *very* tiny yacht, as big as your *Speck*, for instance?" and the Wee Widow turned to the Skipper. "A crew of one, eh?"

All this time the Skipper, like Brer Rabbit, "Kep' on sayin nuffin," for the good reason that, when the Wee Widow got on the talk like this and in the picturesque attitude afore described, he preferred to sit still, smoking, and to watch her.

"You're quite right, dear madam, as you always are," he quoth, softly looking down upon her. "With a boat the size of the *Speck*, and a smart crew of one——"

"And Dickie as able-bodied sea-woman, and self as cox and skipper," interrupted the Wee Widow.

"And only one cabin, and a mere

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kennel for the crew, and no cook, and no steward, and your own washing up to do, and wet days," Lady Arthur interrupted her deprecatingly.

"We'd go and do just what and where we liked——"

"And have a lovely time!" concluded Dickie.

"O Arthur, it *would* be fun! Do you think we could really do it? It *would* be a lark!" But, almost involuntarily, the Wee Widow turned to the Skipper.

"Look here," said the latter. "If you really have a fancy that way, the *Speck* herself is at your service—till you get tired of her. Though I'm her owner and say it as shouldn't, Lord Arthur knows that she's as smart and safe a little boat for her size as there is afloat, and she's been very well fitted out for the summer, and I think you'd be as comfortable in her as you could be in any yacht that size. But any alterations you might suggest——"

The Wee Widow's eyes danced with delight.

"Skipper!" she cried (everyone who knew him well—and the Skipper

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was a man of hosts of friends—called him by that nickname, the origin of which was lost in the mist of years ago, when it had been first bestowed upon him as a newly joined subaltern,) "Skipper," she cried, "you're just too nice! You seem to divine what we should like."

And the Skipper's gray eyes twinkled, and a smile stole out and played around his fair mustache, bleached shades lighter than his hair and his cheeks by a tropic sun.

"But are you sure—do you think—isn't it rather risky—very safe—ought they to go?" And Lady Arthur's eyes roved on from her husband to the Skipper.

"Tush!" said Lord Arthur taciturnly. "They'll be all right, with a good man, in a boat like that, just coasting about, ye know."

"But perhaps we oughtn't to deprive you of the *Speck*," said the Wee Widow demurely to the Skipper.

"Dear madam, proud!" he rejoined. "The *Bulldog*, you know,"—and he nodded in the direction of a small steamer moored further down the line—"is my very latest love,

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my newest toy. Consider the *Speck* as yours, pray, and the man on her, too."

"But is *one* man enough?" Lady Arthur began again. "Don't you think they'd better have two, Arthur? They may get tired or ill, and not want to help with the yacht. Is one man safe?"

Ever since her marriage Lady Arthur had cruised annually in the *Débonnaire* in obedience to the wishes of her lord and master. But it was an acquired taste with her, yachting, and she had never quite got over her dread and dislike of the sea, and looked upon a vessel as nervous people look upon a skittish horse, always fearing "it is going to do something."

"Bosh!" said Lord Arthur again, "one man's enough on a boat like that. If the Skipper recommends the man he's got, take him; if not, you can have a hand off this. But, as a rule, I think it's better to have a man who is thoroughly used to a small boat, than one who is only accustomed to a large one; they can keep their feet better, and get about smarter."

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"And we really want to do something ourselves, manage the sails and steer," put in Dickie. "You forgot, cousin mine, that in the old days at Kilbosh, in papa's time, I used to do a lot of sailing on the lough, the boys and I, quite alone. I can haul a rope, and swim, ever since I could walk, almost. I could swim with you on my back, dear, I'm sure, if occasion arose," she added, with a laugh, jumping up, all her *ennui* passed, and looking down upon the widow from her height of five feet ten, erect and willowy, with a figure which is the envy of other women, but the delight of Redfern, Scot Adie & Co.

As she spoke there were steps up the companion ladder. The conversation had been so engrossing that no one had noticed that a shore-boat had rowed up to the side of the yacht; but though Dickie turned her head in that direction, first of any, it was Lord Arthur who stepped forward and spoke.

"Hullo! why it's Algy again! Glad to see you, old chap! Here's everybody. Had any lunch?"

The new comer formed a contrast

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to the other men. Not owning a yacht, or being a member of any yacht club, he had had the rare courage, during the Cowes week, not to don the regulation blue serge and dark peaked yachting cap. He wore a suit of dittos, and a straw with the blue and yellow ribbon of that crack corps, the Royal Scilly Islanders. But for all his broad, well-drilled shoulders, and the easy swagger for which the Scillies are famous, there was just a shade of nervousness and incoherency in his tone as he explained his appearance.

"Wanted to run over again—got a chap to do my duty—nothing doing to-day at Portsmouth, everybody gone to 'torpedo' dance on the *Vernon*. Thought you might be moving off west to-night or to-morrow, you know."

By which time he had reached Dickie, with whom he shook hands quite gravely.

"Yes, we are moving off directly," said she.

"Tell him, Dickie," added the Wee Widow.

And Dickie told him.

"Jove!" said Algy, settling him

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self in a chair and mixing effervescing drinks which Lord Arthur had called to the steward to bring up. "Jove! What a plucky idea! I know more about a horse than I do about a yacht, but it sounds ripping. I say," he added suddenly, "where shall you go!"

"That's our secret," said Dickie mysteriously.

"I want to prowl up and about all sorts of nooks and corners of the Solent, places where a big yacht can't get," remarked the Wee Widow.

"Come and lie off Southsea pier, and I'll try and amuse you on shore," asked Algy.

"Beastly shelving beach and bad holding ground," said Lord Arthur, in the background.

"Or up Portsmouth Harbor, and I'll show you the dockyard and Whale Island."

"Harbor stinks," chorused the owner of the *Débonnaire*, "and tide runs like a mill-dam."

"Well, then, look here, I have it!" cried the young man, determined not to be daunted. "D'ye know Poole Harbor, awfully pretty place, like Scotland, quite out of the way. My

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people have got a house there for the summer, and if you're tired of sleeping in a dog-kennel, my mother will put you up. It's ever so big, and awfully pretty, is Poole Harbor."

"That's more like it," grunted Lord Arthur.

The Wee Widow lay back in her chair and laughed aloud. He was so ingenuous, this young man.

But Dickie said nothing, except to Grisette, Lady Arthur's pug, whom she called to her and attempted to feed, much to that pampered animal's disgust, with the biscuits the steward had brought up with the whisky and soda.

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## CHAPTER II.

### AT BEMBRIDGE.

"I THINK we did quite right to start quietly alone and from here," remarked the Wee Widow, as the two stepped out on the diminutive platform of the Bembridge station, and collected a Gladstone, two hold-alls, a bundle of rugs, a basket of provisions, and a small white terrier bent on exploring the station on his own account. "I already feel cut off from the world."

"I should think so," answered Dickie, "after such a journey, in such a train," and she gazed at the grass-grown line, and the couple of carriages and toy engine. "A railway in a garden!"

"Five, dear, five distinct railway companies in the Isle of Wight, I'm to edibly informed; the longest mile-H;e some twelve miles, while for Sc

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dividends they compare to advantage with—with, something or other—I don't understand railway shares."

"And for jolting powers are unequaled in the world, I should fancy."

"Let's forget it," said the Wee Widow. "I want my tea. Where can the *Speck* be?"

"Oh! if you're going to be tied to your tea, dear, you'd better go back to the *Débonnaire*. Come along, we must go down to the Hard and shout."

Which Dickie did, much to the amusement of some members of the Bembridge Sailing Club, who were sitting smoking in their toy club-house, gazing at their toy yachts, half-raters, red, blue, and divers colors, queerly rigged, which lay moored below.

"*Speck*, ahoy!"

Dickie's shout brought up a sandy-whiskered and bearded man in a blue jersey, labeled *Speck*, who touched his red-stocking cap.

"Well, here we are, John," said the Wee Widow, "ready to go aboard."

"Yes, m' lady," and he touched

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his cap again, and collected the impedimenta, which he carried off and placed in a minute dingey. Then the ladies stowed themselves. It just held three.

"There were three wise men of Gotham,
Who went to sea in a tub,"

murmured Dickie, as she settled herself at the bows, with her knees up to her chin.

"Don't croak," rebuked the Wee Widow, and John pushed off from shore with his hind leg, after the manner of his kind, and they were really off.

The *Speck* lay at the harbor mouth, under the shadow of the Spithead Hotel. Across, on the other side, red-coated golfers were at work on the sporting links south of the Tweed.

"There is some advantage in length," exclaimed Dickie, as the dingey brought up alongside the little yacht, and she easily stepped out of it on to the deck, and helped out her companion.

"Time will show," retorted the Wee Widow, springing into the little cock-pit, just big enough for two to sit by the tiller, and thence disap-

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peared through into the cabin. "O Dickie! you'll want a back to fold up like a two-foot rule," she cried, "and limbs to take on and off."

Minus these advantages, however, Dickie joined her, and the two sat down—standing was an impossibility, even for the Wee Widow—and surveyed their surroundings.

A sliding hatch gave light and air to a cabin about eight feet square. Above the bunks were shelves and a pane of thick glass. Beneath these, lockers, which ran away under the seats of the cock-pit. At the end opposite the door was a fixed table with three shelves, edged with rims. Above it hung a rack for glasses and bottles, a looking-glass, and a swinging spirit lamp. In the bows of the little vessel was a kind of kennel for John, to which he disappeared through a hatch in the fore-part of the deck.

"It's a good thing we've brought no clothes much," said the Wee Widow ruefully, "for there's nowhere to put them."

"I didn't expect a hanging wardrobe, and if there was one, I should hang myself in it for sleeping, for it

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would be longer than these bunks, I am sure," replied Dickie. "But come, we must unpack and stow away," she added, "or get no tea. I'll put on the kettle. Here are the matches; and here, in this corner of this rack they are to be always replaced, and so will always be found."

"Order and method are to be the rule, and not the exception on this 'ere wessel," quoth the Wee Widow. "A place for everything, etc.; otherwise we shall have no comfort at all."

"Yes, and I vote we take day and day about for cooking and washing up," added Dickie.

"'Liberté, égalité, and fraternité!' shall be the motto of our cruise," quoth her cousin.

The *Speck* was remarkably well found. The owner had been down to her himself a few days before and had settled everything. The mattress cushions had been daintily covered in blue and white chintz, which contrasted well with the white bulkheads or walls, and a soft Oriental rug did for carpet. Eider-down pillows in gay covers were in the corners, and in one locker the Wee Widow came upon scarlet blankets and ship's

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sheets, made to button on to the cushions. She herself had sent down from Fortnum & Mason a case of wine and provisions, which John had unpacked and stowed away before their arrival. In a few minutes the kettle, filled by John from the water beaker lashed to the mast, was singing on the large spirit lamp, and the tea-things arranged on the tiny table's topmost shelf, while Dickie cut bread and butter on her knees.

Meantime the Wee Widow had emptied the hold-alls and stowed away their contents (which consisted merely of a change and of a spare serge skirt and an extra flannel blouse) under the mattress. She put the empty hold-alls there too, for the great advantage of hold-alls on a vessel is that they take up no room when empty, unlike a bag or trunk. Each had only two hats, a sailor for hot days and shore, and a workman-like peaked yachting cap. Those not in use found a home on one of the hooks with which the cabin abounded. The mackintoshes and the umbrellas were stowed away behind the seats of the cock-pit, where they could easily be got at in

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case of wet from sky or sea, and over each bunk was fixed a wall-pocket for toilet requisites and odds and ends.

"I learned that dodge," explained the Widow, "when we went by P. O. to Malta to join the *Débonnaire*. It is such a comfort, saving hours of hunting for hairpins and tooth-brushes and needle and thread. And really," she concluded, gazing triumphantly round, when everthing was arranged, "there is, barring head-room, nearly as much space here as in a P. O. cabin for three people sometimes."

"Tea is ready," announced Dickie.

That evening, when the sun was sinking behind the Downs, and the trippers had departed by the last steamer, and the golfing men had rowed across to the hotel to dinner, the Wee Widow interviewed her crew and studied the chart.

"John," she said, "we want to go across to-morrow, and up Chichester Harbor to Bosham."

"Yes, m' lady, I been there once, and the Channel's staked."

"Then there's no mistaking it, eh?" laughed the lady. You can always joke with a first-class yacht's

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hand, for long association in close quarters with gentlefolks gives them manners and tact, and a capability for self-effacement such as is not often possessed by an upper-class servant. They know when to talk, and when to be silent.

"When shall we start?" she inquired.

John stroked his sandy whiskers, and replied in his soft "Darset" burr:

"Best get out o' thiz on half-tide, m' lady, so as to kitch high-water over Chichester bar; it's nigh dry at low tide."

"We'll make an early start, then, John, and have the day before us."

Then she turned in to dinner, so called. Dickie was delicately contemplating two mutton chops in a frying-pan over the lamp.

"*Madame est servie!*" she cried. "And this is the *menu*. Yacht *Speck*, Bembridge, August –th. Potage, mock turtle *à la* Fortnum & Mason. Cotelettes de mouton *à la—à la—à la* 'Dickie'! Cold pressed tongue. Dessert, cherries."

Going to bed was easier said than done. A tarpaulin arranged over the cock-pit allowed the occupants of the

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cabin to have the door open, and thus gain space and air. The little apartment looked quite cozy by the light of the swinging lantern. But the toilet was a difficulty. One at a time was the order of the day. So the Wee Widow went and sat on deck while Dickie wrestled with hers.

It was a quiet night, but dark. John had lit the riding light and it swung on the fore-rigging. No returning fishing-boat could now run foul of the *Speck*. But the harbor was very quiet, and so was the twinkling shore. Far away, across on the mainland, the lights of Southsea flared into the night. Somehow the Wee Widow fell to thinking.

It all felt very strange, and to think that she should be on *his* boat! Her thoughts went back to that girlhood which seemed so long ago, though she was barely thirty. She recalled the owner of the *Speck*, as he had looked as a smart, slim, subaltern, cultivating a tiny straw mustache. She remembered things he —they—had done, words he had said, and then, with a sort of a pang, words he had left unsaid. It all came back to her, his going away to

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India, with that good-by which had meant so much. And there had come, later, her marriage—that good, solid marriage, cause of so much congratulation and envy—the middle-aged, political husband, a distinguished man, who had been, during the few short years of her married life, all that a good and honorable English gentleman should be to his wife, *except* the ideal lover of her girlish dreams. But how dreamy that married life already seemed, how long past! For here, after all these years, was the Skipper back again into her life, and back much the same, himself, as he had left it, tender, devoted, sympathetic. But he had returned a colonel, and unexpectedly rich and his own master. The dainty *Speck* was but one of his toys. But, as often happens with a man who from being poor and hard worked has come into money, he did not seem quite able to accommodate himself to his altered circumstances. He had been restless all that London season, the first since his return. At Cowes he had appeared quieter, more content. But all his future plans seemed

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vague, his movements erratic. The Wee Widow wondered.

"Coast clear!" shouted Dickie, from the cabin, and, shaking off her thoughts, her companion groped her way under the tarpaulin and into the light again.

"I've had to sit on the floor to brush out my hair," exclaimed the girl, holding out an arm-long plait of black hair, "and oh! I don't know what you'll do with your clothes when you get out of them!"

"If it wasn't for the dew we might hang them along the boom, like a man-o'-war on washing day," suggested her companion.

"Fie!" cried Dickie, "and you the chaperon! Good-night. I'm ashamed of you."

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## CHAPTER III.

### TO BOSHAM, AND ALL ABOUT ITS LOST BELL.

A FINE morning, with a light but steady breeze blowing from the west; the sun shining on a rippling sea, blue as the blue sky above dappled with light fleecy clouds on the move, and with more opaque and stately "Derbyshire maids," fringing the western horizon, like giant Alps of an unknown world.

After a light and easily cooked breakfast of coffee and boiled eggs, with hot rolls and fresh milk John had fetched from shore, Dickie, while the Wee Widow made all snug below, and removed every trace of sleeping, helped the "crew" to haul up the mainsail, and the little *Speck* ran out of Bembridge Harbor under all sail and on a fair wind.

At the tiller sat the Wee Widow, perched on the edge of the deck, her

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feet on the seat of the cock-pit, and her eye fixed occasionally glancing at the burgee fluttering at the masthead.

"There, John," she exclaimed, "I think that's as near as she will stand, isn't it? A shade shaking, is the mainsail? Have I got her too near the wind? There, that's better! Now, shall I steer on the fort at the entrance to Langston? So? Now, get the topsail up, John. With a light wind like this we can bear the topsail. Besides, it looks sporting."

"What luck we're in about the morning!" cried Dickie, emerging from her struggle with hot water and the breakfast cups. "Will it last, do you think, John?"

John, prone on the fore-part of the little deck, one eye on the sails and another on the ship's course, scratched his red head pensively, and answered in a cautious manner:

"Dunno, miss. Myzelf, I likes to see the wind go round with the zun. That means fine weather. It's backed a bit zince yesterday."

"Well, a westerly wind is what we want for this trip," remarked the

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lady consolingly. "What's the time?"

Dickie glanced down at the little brass clock ticking away in the cabin.

"Not ten yet. How early, and yet how fresh we feel. How soundly and yet lightly one sleeps on board ship," remarked the Wee Widow.

"And how hungry, too. Already I am beginning, and not only in my capacity of cook, to think about the next meal."

"'Man wants but little here below.' But wants that little good — and often, at sea," she went on. "Appetizing little meals; not taking too long to cook, or too much preparation."

And she went and fetched the cookery-book, which the Wee Widow, fully aware of her own culinary incapacity, had had the forethought to bring aboard.

Past St. Helen's Point, leaving the No Man Fort on the left, close to the red Warner Lightship, looking glaring in full light of day. Across from Eastney Barracks, a white mass at the extremity of the long line of the Southsea houses, came ever and anon

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a sullen boom, followed by a white cloud in the water.

"Best not go too far in, m' lady, when they's at big-gun practice," quoth John the cautious, from for'ard.

And the Wee Widow took up a point a little further up the shore and more off the wind.

But the sound of the guns had diverted Dickie's mind from the cookery-book.

"They say the Solent is not hermetically sealed at the end," she remarked; "is open to any fleet's guns. And yet," she continued, looking behind her at the Puckpool fort on the mainland, and at the three giant round forts in the water, "one would think it strongly protected."

Dickie was lying behind the Wee Widow on the counter, and the latter, without taking her eyes off her steering, patted her slyly with her disengaged hand.

"Who say, dear? Is Mrs. Beeton responsible for such a military opinion?" she asked scathingly.

Dickie tossed her head, and disdained to reply.

"Oh, see!" she cried presently,

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giving a very obvious turn to the conversation. "There's a race coming down from Ryde!"

And, indeed, a grand sight was slowly coming into view from the west. One behind the other, in stately line, a racing fleet, with all sail, including spinnakers, set, stalked toward them, like small mountains of white canvas. There was the *Valkyrie*, whitehulled; the stately *Lethe;* the graceful *Reverie.*

"They'll take all day and all night getting round the island, unless the wind freshens," remarked the Wee Widow. "We mustn't take their wind," she added chaffingly, as one after another of the big yachts skimmed past the little *Speck* at some distance. Then a steamer came by, and a cruising yacht or two, for the inland sea was alive that lovely August morning. Away, at Spithead, the tall masts and the low bulky barbettes of a couple of war vessels lay motionless at anchor.

With due deference to the big-gun practice at Eastney, the woman at the helm, now that they had neared the Hampshire shore, ran before the wind, and up the coast. John let out

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the mainsail and the mizzen, thereby improving Dickie's position on the counter.

Past the low sandy shore of Hayling Island, with its bathing machines and its white houses amid the trees, and its links ; past the long spit which runs out to the east, and the sun grew hotter, the breeze lighter, and the tide slacker.

"What about the bar and the tide, John?" asked the Wee Widow, as she relinquished the helm to Dickie, and went forward to the bows.

"High water won't be till between one and two, m' lady. I reckon we'll have to put out a ketch and wait outzide for it," said John.

"What do we draw?"

"Five feet, m' lady."

"Well, we'd better wait and not run the risk of sticking on the mud."

Then the steerswoman's voice sounded from aft:

"I say, John, I see no signs of this Chichester Harbor of yours. Nothing but a continuous line of these sand-dunes sweeping round to Selsea Bill."

"All right, miss, we're not level with it yet. Keep on straight ahead.

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Another point away, miss, or you'll gibe her."

Down went the tiller a minute fragment of space, yet enough to avoid the risk of gibing and the consequent jar to ropes and spars, which is the great thing to be feared when running before the wind, making steering, under those circumstances, less easy than steering with the wind on one's quarter.

"What a lonely looking coast," Dickie went on. "And, do you see, a regular mirage on Selsea Bill over there. See those clumps of trees standing, as it were, on their heads in the glare and glaze of the sea and sky?"

"Yet Chichester Harbor was much frequented in olden times," put in the Wee Widow, "when the Romans had their great camp of Regnum near what is now Chichester, and their triremes were rowed about those waters. Harold sailed from Bosham, too, on his last expedition to Normandy to try and square matters with Duke William."

"Well, m' lady," interposed John, with sudden alacrity, "I dunno how about Harold, but I've heerd my fey-

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ther (his fust wife came from about heres, and he owned a fishing-boat) say as how there was a tidy bit o' zmugglin' done up Chichester Harbor way when he wur a lad."

"Oh, how exciting!" cried Dickie, to whom the near past was more interesting than classic days.

"Keep her head straight, miss, The opening's beyond them white coast-guard stations; but there aint enough water yet. I've heerd my feyther tell," he continued—with a smile of the quiet content which any evasion of the customs duties, even in these enlightened days, never fails to elicit from the seafaring mind—"I've heerd my feyther tell as 'ow they brought the casks in sunken and towed behind the boats, by a rope running through a false tiller—a holler one, ye know, m' lady—with a hole in it. My feyther's fust wife's feyther, he wur church clerk on Tharney Island, in up there among the trees. They kep' the casks in the church tower zometimes. I zpects he had a finger in the pie."

"I've no doubt of it, John," said the Wee Widow. "Good brandy was cheap in those days, eh? Ah!

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there's the harbor's mouth. Do you see it, Dickie? Behind that sand hill. And now, John, what shall we do about the tide?"

"Better make a leg out, m' lady, and throw out a hanchor in the channel, and wait, m' lady," was the mysterious sounding advice.

And a few minutes later the *Speck*, her mainsail hauled down and tumbled in a mass on the hatch and the cock-pit, was lying at anchor opposite the narrow entrance,

> As idle as a painted ship
> Upon a painted ocean.

"It's hot!" exclaimed the Wee Widow. "Hot, waiting here"—as she took refuge in the cabin to get out of the way of the mainsail.

"And it's just stifling here," replied Dickie, who was investigating the larder. "Too hot to cook. I had intended—but what do you say to a cold lunch?"

"You lazy girl! Yes, with plenty of salad and soda water."

"John, how long before there is water enough?"

"Another hour, miss."

"What *are* we to do? It's too

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hot to read. And such an uninteresting Dutch coast too!"

"And beyond this narrow entrance the promised land, where we may not enter, looks so inviting, with the green woods—like other things in life," murmured the Wee Widow, half to herself.

"What a sigh! Come, the heat makes you sentimental, *ma petite*. *Ah*, I have it! What do you say to a bathe?"

The water looked invitingly cool, but the Wee Widow's swimming powers were limited.

"I shouldn't care to go over the side," said she, "even in the one life-belt which so conspicuously adorns the cabin."

"It's half the fun!" replied Dickie. "But look here, I'll row you in the dingey away round the point there, where it's shallow and reedy and sandy."

It was an ideal bathing place they found: snug and just inside the harbor mouth. The tide ran slack, in among a reedy creek, and the place was all silent and deserted, even the sandpipers seemed taking a noontide siesta. The burgee of the

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*Speck*, just visible outside the sand-hills, was the only sign of life. The water was hot, but the sand hotter still, and the two swam and floated again, till Dickie, venturing a long stretch out from shore, returned, suggesting that there was now water enough to take them over the bar. So they dressed and rowed off to the *Speck*, Dickie's black mane drying down her back.

"There's one comfort in our present Bohemian existence," she remarked. "I shall abjure curling irons till——"

"Till when?" asked the Wee Widow.

"Never mind. Tie up the painter, and let me help John up with the mainsail. The wind has died away almost, hasn't it? But the tide will take us up, though."

A bit of Holland under the very shadow of the Goodwood Downs. The little *Speck*, her canvas scarcely filling, crept lazily into a great estuary whose three arms met at the bar. All around lay a world of mud—slate-colored mud, emerald-green mud, covered with weeds, looking for all the world like a meadow;

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brown mud, with queer red tones in it, the delight of artists, and oozy mud, half water, half land—and every moment "the creeping, crawling tide" stole up further and further, and swelled out the winding channel where the sticks and posts reared their guiding heads, like relics of a submerged world. The high-water mark was fringed with yellow grass, and beyond that again, trees, stunted and gnarled, and bent and wearied-looking at first, stood out against the skyline, growing in size and quantity as the channel wound further inland.

"That's Emsworth channel, m' lady," explained John, pointing to the westerly arm of the estuary. "The wickedest place in England is Emsworth; every third house a public! And right over agin you, them tall elms is Tharney Island."

"Have we come to the Fenland? There's a Thorney Island in Cambridgeshire, I know. But it is here, Dickie, that Cædmon, the first British poet, was born. St. Wilfred, who evangelized these parts, took Cædmon north to St. Hilda's monastory at Whitby when he was

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made Bishop of Ripon, when he acted as ferryman to the abbey, having been, of course, used to the water here. Cædmon was a religious poet; his "Hymn" is preserved at the University Library at Cambridge. So that is the smuggling place, John?"

"Yes, m' lady. My feyther's feyther-in-law, him as was parish clerk, said as how they used to have india-rubber tires to the waggins, so that they mightn't make no noise when they tuk and druv' a haul of kegs into Emsworth. He wur parish clerk, but blez ye, m' lady, he wouldn't know his old church now. It's a very ancient church, m' lady, with Romin bricks built in, they zay; but they've tukken away the big pews, and what with the carpets and the curtains, and the flowers and the paintin', it looks beautiful, but it aint so znug to zit in."

"I thought churches were to pray and not to sit in," remarked the Wee Widow softly.

But John evidently did not consider controversy becoming to his place, and he busied himself with his never failing amusement of arrang-

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ing the ropes about the mast in symmetrical coils.

From a black hulk moored near the bar, coastguards peered out to inspect the *Speck*, and retired again, their curiosity gratified. Away to the north a half-submerged line of stakes and groins crossed the entrance of the Princetown channel. An effort was once made to drain it and reclaim the land; but one night some years ago, during a gale, when the tide came rolling in over the bar, the works gave way with a sudden rush, and the coastguards on watch on them had to flee over to Thorney for their lives.

The Wee Widow, whose little head was well filled, sat on deck with the chart laid out before her.

"Itchenor Point," she said, waving to a line of trees extending to the water's edge. "It reminds one of the Danish occupation—Itchnor, Bognor—all names ending in "or" are Danish. I like to think of the dragon-prowed galleys coming sailing up here with the tide, the Vikings at the helm."

"Well, for my part, I'm thinking of lunch," replied Dickie the prac-

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tical. "Let John take the tiller, and come down and let us eat. My bathe has made me starving."

And though the channel was growing narrower, and the tide fast concealing the mud, and trees and meadows fringed the banks, and red cows, with an eye to the picturesque, came and arranged themselves in Cooperish attitudes on the grass, the Wee Widow was not proof against veal and ham pie, and cake to follow, which Dickie had brought out of the locker she called her larder.

"I shall have a great cooking to-night," said she, "here in the quiet waters, where there will be no risk of having stewed fruit and cream or tepid stew upset into one's face, as one lies sleeping, from the shelf above."

"By all means," returned the Wee Widow calmly; "there will be less for me to do to-morrow when *my* turn comes."

At that moment there was a sudden movement on the part of John up above, a hurrying forward, a loosening of ropes. The wind, which had got up a little as the sun declined, was veering to northwest, and was against them. The channel was nar-

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row, and it was necessary to "go about." From that out there was plenty for everyone to do. Tacking at very short intervals, they wound on their devious way. While Dickie washed up, her companion was busy putting down the tiller, or slacking or making fast the jibsheets in conjunction with John. It was steady work; but it was sailing, and, compared with it, the running before the wind was monotony itself. The scenery and the Danes were all forgotten in the anxiety to clear the mud and the warning booms which marked the narrow channel, and yet to gain, by clever steering, every available inch on each tack, as they rounded successive promontory and reach.

"This 'ere's the bell-hole, m' lady," suddenly remarked John, breaking into the duet of "lee-ho!" "Let go jib, foresail! Make fast," which he and the Wee Widow had kept up for some time.

"Bell-hole?" cried Dickie, who was at leisure again; "what bell?"

"The lost bell o' Bozham, miss. It's down there, under the water; you can hear it a-ringing sometimes," he added mysteriously.

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"A ghostly bell, a fairy bell, a bell of Aberbrothock?" cried Dickie. "Is there a story to it, John?"

"'Deed, I don't know, miss; but my feyther's feyther-in-law, him as was church clerk, he'd heerd it."

"I know the story, Dickie," put in the Wee Widow, gazing down into the dark waters as they passed over a wide reach where two creeks joined the main channel. "It was my friends, the Vikings, and they stole the tenor bell of Bosham Abbey Church. St. Nicholas let them do so, as a punishment to the lazy monks. We're in St. Wilfrid's community, you know; he christianized this part, from Selsea, and built the Bosham monastery. But, when the dragon-prowed galleys with their booty got as far as this place, the saint, it appears, thought better of it, so he caused the bell to disappear into the depths through an opening in the vessel, and there it has remained ever since."

"Didn't the penitent monks try to recover it?" inquired Dickie.

"They did. St. Nicholas told them in a dream that it would be possible to pull the bell up by means of a team of white oxen. And they tried, col-

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lecting with care snow-white cattle. But, just as the bell reached the surface, the rope broke, and back it fell, and they subsequently found that one of the oxen had a black hair in his tail."

Dickie leant over the side, listening for the missing bell.

"You'll not hear it now, miss," said John, who had attended with much interest to the story. "It's when the other zeven bells ring away out in Bozham steeple, as folk, zalin' over the bell-hole, hears the eighth answering them from down below."

"It's something to do with acoustics, and an echo, caused by currents joining here. I read the story in an archæological book on Sussex once, little dreaming that I should ever sail over the 'bell-hole.'"

"Alas!" sighed Dickie, "there's another illusion gone, like dear old William Tell and his apple, and Romulus and Remus! I know that in music, if you sound the bass note and the fifth, you hear the octave as well."

"That's as may be, miss," put in John, quite unconvinced. "But all I knows is that there be only zeven

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bells in Bozham steeple now, and you hears t'other ringin' here. Besides, the Bozham folk themzelves knows the story," he added, with the air of one refuting all argument. "If you wants to get a Bozham man put out, you've only got to call him a 'ding-dong.'"

"Most convincing, and most interesting," said the Wee Widow, *sotto voce* to Dickie. "It's quite refreshing nowadays to find a myth so firmly rooted. And there's Bosham steeple!"

Round a wooded point, the *Speck*, gliding into Bosham Deep, came full in sight of the village, lying red-tiled, with wharves and black sheds, on the water's edge. It is an artist's haunt, remote alike from the bustle of populous Portsmouth on one hand and of frivolous Brighton on the other. The brethren of the brush love to find their way here, year after year, to paint the water and the many-toned oozy mud, in the quiet woodland setting. But "if you would view fair Bosham aright," you must approach it from the sea, as the *Speck* did, and catch the grouping and the coloring of the houses, the crazy

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windmill, and the conical church spire rising amid the trees, and backed by the bold green line of the Downs.

When the anchor had been let down in Bosham Deep, (another likeness to the fen country in the name "deep,") and the kettle boiled in the cabin, the two yachtswomen sat enjoying a well earned cup of tea and the scene simultaneously, while in the foreground two old rotten barges filled and sank with the rising tide, as had probably been their daily custom for years past.

After tea Dickie pulled her companion, and Nip, too, of course, ashore in the dingey, and they moored it on the quay and walked across a little green meadow, where, under some willows, a brook, running down from the distant hills, loses itself in the deep.

"Duty first and pleasure after," said Dickie, sternly, to the Wee Widow, who was gazing wistfully at the massive church above them. "We want bread and milk, and fresh meat and vegetables."

And she dragged her off down the village street, past the gate and wall

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which is all that is left of the monastery, and began her catering. Not till she had provisioned the *Speck* as if for a week's cruise, did she allow the Wee Widow to turn into the churchyard, under the yew trees, and enter the severe early Norman church, with the massive Saxon tower.

Inside, it was very gloomy under the heavy arches and lofty, high-pitched roof, and the summer afternoon sunlight struggled but dimly into the chapel in the southern aisle, where lies Herbert of Bosham, the friend, secretary, and biographer of Becket, and sometime Bishop of Benevento.

Dickie linked her arm in that of her little cousin, and the tall figure and the little slim one paced together, in their shirts and serge skirts and yachting caps, up the nave, where Harold the unlucky and his armed men had marched to say their prayers the evening before they set sail for Normandy, and up which Knut, the king, and his fair-haired Norsemen, had borne all that was mortal of the great Danish monarch's three-year-old daughter, who died at

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Bosham. Through the apse at the east end the light fell on her grave in the chancel, now marked with a tile painted with the black raven which was the Northmen's crest.

"There is no doubt about Harold's connection with Bosham," said the Wee Widow, seating herself, and looking round the dim, silent, bare edifice. "This church is depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry, as a background to Harold's embarkation on Bosham Deep, and its name affixed."

"But what did Harold do in these parts?" asked Dickie. "One, somehow, does not associate him with this remote corner."

"One must recollect how wild and unprotected was the rest of the coast of Britain, and how valuable for the small and ill sailing vessels of the time were estuaries like the Wash, the Humber, and the Solent and its branches, to realize why so much of English history clusters round these fiords of ours from Roman times downward. But Bosham came to Harold from Earl Godwin, his father, who got it by a fraud. Its rich manor belonged to the Archbishop, to whom the sly earl went to make

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obeisance, asking in Latin: '*Da me Boscam.*' And the Archbishop thought he was asking for the kiss of peace—*basiam*—and responded: '*Da tibi*,' a slip of which Godwin was not slow to take advantage. But he came to a bad end, was choked, using naughty words, if you remember, and so did his poor son after."

Outside the church they found an old inhabitant, sexton probably, in smock frock, admiring Nip, the white terrier, who had come ashore with his mistress and had been left outside. The Wee Widow makes it a rule to *exploiter* any aborigines she comes across in her wanderings, and she complimented the old fellow on the possession of such a fine and interesting church.

"Is there anyone in the village who could tell us more about it?" she asked.

The old man wagged his head.

"There was, mum, when I was a boy, a terrible sight o' papers as gentlefolks set no end o' store by, and was allus askin' to see. They kep' 'em in the big chest behind the orgin. But the church clerk as then was—

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there's some o' the fambly livin' here now—he got so terrible tired o' carryin' o' the paapers up to the Vicarage for parson to show folks, that one day he set afire to 'em—accidentally, ye know, mum," added the old man, with a wink.

"And destroyed a perfect mine of information, of course," sighed the Wee Widow." 'Ding-Dong' was not a bad enough name for him!"

"Well, mum," retorted the old man, who had caught the opprobrious epithet, and forthwith took up the cudgels on behalf of his native place, "the neighbors may call us 'ding-dongs' if they choose, but once upon a time they was glad enough of help from Bosham, especially the Chichester folk."

"Tell us?" asked the Wee Widow, perceiving a story in the air.

"'Twur in the plague time, mum, when the black plague came from Lunnon to Chichester. It wur awful; hundreds died, the city was stricken, not a soul allowed to go out or into it, till arter the plague come the famine. They were just starving. The mayor he wrote a proclamation and fixed it on the gates, asking for food,

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and a Bosham man happened to see it. He told his friends, and they started out nex' morning with cart-loads o' vittles, and halted near the west gate. There they left the food, and the Chichester people come and placed money in a stone water-trough for cattle, side of the road. That's how the Bosham folk helped the Chichester people, till the great thunderstorm come and took away the plague."

"Tradition only, I fear, but it shall be encouraged," remarked the Wee Widow, slipping a shilling into the old man's hand as they left the churchyard.

The tide had turned, the old barges were emptying fast, and the jibboom of the *Speck* was pointing away down channel. Evening shadows fell on grass-grown graves, and across the shallow water under the red-tiled sheds where the village children played and paddled, their voices and laughter ringing through the still air.

Even Dickie the practical was impressed. She looked back at the church, and the sweep of the downs behind the windmill.

"Only to think of the lots of times

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that we've looked down on this place from Goodwood grand stand up there, and not known anything about it!" she cried.

"While the yells of 'two to one bar one' and 'the odds on the field' have drowned the legends of centuries and the ringing of the seven Bosham bells," added the Wee Widow.

"But I must back to my dinner," said Dickie, "or you'll get none. I'll leave you Nip for a companion, he wants a run."

"And send John ashore with the camera while there is still light enough for me," cried the Wee Widow, as Dickie shot away from the deserted Hard in the direction of the yacht.

The Wee Widow, when the faithful John brought her her photographic arrangements, was sitting on a low wall by the brook, admiring the sunset, and feeling disinclined for taking views.

"There's no light now. I wish we had never brought the stupid thing, its legs have been in the way dreadfully in the cabin. Take it back, John, please."

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"I want news of the outer world," she went on to herself. "It's nice, very, and restful, and new, but just a *leetle* dull. I'll go to the post and ask for letters."

And she whistled for Nip and went off down the village street in the gloaming. Yet she hardly knew what letters she expected. Lord Arthur, admirable elder brother that he was, never wrote if he could possibly avoid putting pen to paper, and then he generally telegraphed. It was the time of year when people are all on the wing, and though she had ordered letters to be sent to Bosham, she was intensely surprised to receive one. It took the shape of a parcel, a neat little card box, bearing Buszard's magic name.

The Wee Widow walked out of the post office, and opened it going down the road. Nip looked up at her and sniffed appreciatively.

"Yes, Nip," she said, "it's a cake, and one of Buszard's best," she added, tasting it. "Have a bit?"

A card dropped out of the box. She picked it up and deciphered it in the fading light.

"A slight contribution to the com-

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missariat of the *Speck* from 'the skipper' of the *Bulldog*."

The Wee Widow smiled a queer little smile all to herself. Then she looked down at Nip.

"I wonder—— Nip, I wish I knew!" she murmured.

But Nip only wagged a sympathetic tail, and asked for more cake.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### TO SOUTHSEA. TWO IS COMPANY, ETC.

THE two yachtswomen awoke next morning to a dull day and a decidedly north wind blowing off the Sussex Downs, which rose along the horizon, capped here and there with a ring of trees. It was a shade chill, even for August, on the water. But they spent the morning ashore, as it was no use going back till close upon high water on account of the bar, and high water would not be till between two and three o'clock. John amused himself on the *Speck* with a seemingly interminable cleaning up, which resulted in every square inch of brass about the little vessel shining like a new pin. He also, much to Dickie's disgust, did sculleryman's work in the cabin, and

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washed up all the dirty crockery and glass he could lay hands upon.

Later in the day the Wee Widow discovered this.

"John is an angel in a blue jersey," she murmured softly, gazing admiringly at a shining tumbler, which, yesterday, in Dickie's hands had presented a misty and melancholy appearance, "an angel unawares!"

"But it isn't at all fair!" retorted her companion with a toss of her head. "After all the trouble I took yesterday—and the soda and the scalding water, (when it *did* boil,) and my hands like *this!*" she added, exhibiting paws already getting tanned and red, and feeling herself a martyr. "It was *your* turn to-day!"

"Dickie, you're just another angel, that's all!" responded the Widow in that sweet little tone of hers which is so hard to quarrel against. "You shan't do it again, ever, for, I tell you what—only mind, and it's a secret, and you shan't divulge it at the end of our voyage, on pain of death, do you hear?—John shall wash up *always!*" she added solemnly.

"And peel the potatoes? You

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don't know how difficult it is to peel potatoes!"

"And I don't want to," replied the Wee Widow ungrammatically. "John shall add that to his other labors, provided, of course, always, it is consistent with the safety of the vessel."

"Oh, if that's all, I cheerfully run the risk of coming to grief!" cried Dickie, and the affair was settled.

They had spent the morning ashore photographing the church and the village more or less successfully during the intermittent gleams of sunshine. Then the Widow had wrestled equally more or less with a hot lunch. After that, up came the anchor and the mainsail, and the *Speck* glided away seaward toward Itchenor Point.

"Good-by, you nice, pretty Bosham!" cried Dickie, turning her head a moment from the tiller. "I shall often look down upon you and think of you when I am up there on the Cup Day!" she added, jerking her head toward the Goodwood Downs.

"Humph!" retorted her companion, who was in the cabin putting

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away the lunch. "You will probably find the 'Scilly Islander' lunch under the beeches too engrossing, as it was *this* year, dear, to think of anything else!"

"Lunch, did you mention?" replied Dickie, gazing up at the fluttering burgee in the most nonchalant manner. "No more, thank you. What a good cake that was for a little village like Bosham! Odd, isn't it, how nice things are where you least expect to find them? You're a better caterer than I thought; isn't she, Nip?" she added. "You liked that cake, eh?"

Nip, the all-wise, wagged his tail exceedingly, but held his tongue.

An hour and a half's run down, and once more the inland world of greenery, meadows, and human habitations gave place to stormbent trees, swamps, and sand dunes, as again they approached the open sea. The incoming tide raced up and overflowed the wide mud flats, and swirled round the sticks and turns which marked the channel. The wind was, on the whole, fair, though the course was devious, and was fresh, and Dickie experienced no

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difficulty in taking the *Speck* safely through the channel and across the bar.

Once outside there was a tight-hauling of all the sails, as the wind was now on the quarter, and the *Speck's* bow was turned to westward.

"Past three o'clock, John," said the Widow. "The wind freshening. Shall we make Beaulieu River mouth, do you think?"

"I think we'd better not chance it, m' lady," replied that cautious individual. "I haven't ever been up Beaulieu River but once, and I'd sooner make it at dead low water—there's a queer bank runs along the mouth."

"Then I vote, John, we don't attempt it to-day," replied the lady. "What do you think about just running down to Southsea, and lying off there to-night?"

"A north wind, m' lady; it aint much odds if we do. But it's not good holding-ground, m' lady, and a shelving beach; and I couldn't recommend it—not if the wind were to change."

"I really think John must have

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been born north of the Tweed instead of in Dorset," laughed the Widow *sotto voce* to Dickie. "His caution exasperates me. What do *you* say to stopping at Southsea?"

"Oh! I don't mind, I'm sure," replied Dickie, turning away her head, with the air of one merely obliging her friend.

The Wee Widow smiled a tiny smile all to her little self as she went back to her never ending occupation of tidying the cabin. It was perfectly extraordinary how, in that tiny apartment, some eight feet by ten only, inanimate objects seemed to possess the knack of losing and mixing themselves up in the most unaccountable manner.

"They want a helping hand, poor young things," she said to herself, as she extricated a hairpin from the jampot and discovered the long lost corkscrew among the pillows. "People generally do—and sometimes don't get it," she added, with a half sigh.

The *Speck*, heeling over, sped along past Hayling Island, and the great white mass of Eastney Barracks, where the big guns were now

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silent. On the wooded hills of the Isle of Wight, to the south, rose the spires of Ryde. As they approached Southsea the scene was anything but quiescent. Yachts and pleasure craft of every rig and size were moored opposite the beach, where holiday makers of every age were enjoying themselves after their own fashion—rowing, paddling, digging, loafing, and flirting. There were niggers, itinerant venders of refreshments, and in the Casino on each pier a brass band was braying lustily.

"This is rather dreadful!" murmured the Wee Widow, with a shudder.

"Would you like to lie up Portsmouth Harbor, m' lady?" asked John.

"'Stinks, and runs like a mill dam,'" said the Wee Widow, quoting her brother's words. "No, John; let us take up our mooring here; it's fresh, at all events, and cheerful."

There was a discussion with the owner of a sailing boat near, and eventually the *Speck* took up the moorings of a yacht about her own size, which was said to have gone away for two or three days.

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"I feel small," quoth Dickie, when this operation had been deftly and satisfactorily performed before hundreds of critical eyes, as she looked round her at the larger craft which surrounded them.

"Which must be quite a pleasant change for you, dear," laughed her companion. "But come and have tea; it's ready, and so is the—the *Bosham* cake. Afterward we'll go ashore. I want to get something at a shop, and then we'll go and listen to the band."

Now these two women had actually been several days without seeing a shop, and they experienced quite a delight in flattening their noses against the windows in Palmerston; odd, wasn't it? When Dickie went into a chemist's to seek for something wherewith to counteract the effect of the washing up upon her hands, the Wee Widow seized the opportunity to slip into the post office and send a telegram. It was addressed to a certain person at the "Scilly Islander" barracks. Then, slowly, on the way popping in and out of shops, they sauntered back to the beach.

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"Civilization is rather nice, after all," quoth the Wee Widow.

"And new bread," added Dickie, as she popped her many parcels into the dingey John had moored at the Corinthian Club landing stage.

They had cooked their dinner and eaten it.

Night sank upon the dusky beach and on the purple sea.

The lights flashed upon the esplanade, and the gayly illuminated Casino twinkled in the wind; the yachts all round hung out their riding-lights, which wabbled aimlessly with the swell. Strains of music, shouts of laughter, scraps of conversation, were borne in upon them by the breeze.

"What a change from last night!" thought Dickie, slipping on her pea coat as she emerged on deck.

"*Speck* ahoy!" a voice cried out of the gloom—a voice very near.

"Oh!" cried Dickie. She didn't mean it in the least, but she couldn't help it; it slipped out.

A shore boatman in a little rowboat shipped his oars under the stern of the *Speck*, and laid a detaining hand on her deck.

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"*Speck*, ahoy! Anyone at home?" cried the voice again, and the long young man they had called Algy on the *Débonnaire* stood up in the boat.

"Oh! you've turned up, have you?" cried the Wee Widow, appearing from below. "Got my wire, eh?"

It was well for her that it was too dark for her to feel the full severity of the glance which Dickie shot at her out of her black eyes.

"Good-evening," remarked the latter, with her chin in the air. "What an odd time to call!" she added, with what she intended to be chilling coldness.

But the young man they called Algy was far too happy to be capable of feeling a snub.

"You see I've only *just* got your wire," he replied, sitting down beside Dickie in the little cock-pit. There is never much room there at the best of times, and what with the darkness, and pretending there was less room than there really was, Algy did sit very close. It is difficult to be dignified and stand-offish under such circumstances.

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"And we've only been in an hour or two!"

"And I couldn't well come and call on you in mid-ocean, could I?" pleaded Algy, but it was to Dickie he turned.

This young person, though inwardly raging over the trick the Wee Widow had played, mad with her ladyship, as well as with the wretched Algy for being an accomplice, so mad that her cheeks burnt bright red through the sunburn, though the others could not see it, relented a little. It was very difficult to quarrel with Algy long.

"Have you had any dinner?"

"It was too early for mess, but I had a chop before I came off."

"That's a good thing," retorted Dickie, "for we've eaten all ours, and if you want any you must cook it!"

"De-lighted, if I wanted any, which I don't!" cried Algy imperturbably. "I'm sure I could cook beautifully, if you were only to show me how!"

"I'm afraid you'd have to go hungry a long——" snapped Dickie, who really did feel horribly annoyed.

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But the Wee Widow broke in from the cabin.

"Now then, you two, the boat's too small to fight in! Come in here like good children and help me make the coffee, and then we'll all go ashore and listen to the band."

The tiny cabin, bright with the lantern and the glowing spirit kettle, lighting up the gay cretonne and Dickie's red cheeks and flashing eyes, looked remarkably cozy to Algy. That young man was in excellent spirits, full of the latest news and gossip, and brimming over with cheerfulness. The ladies had been for three mortal days cut off from the world and a daily paper. It was very nice to find someone they knew again. Almost before she was aware of it, Dickie had hauled down her colors and had forgiven them all, while the Wee Widow was innocence itself, with a look in her great soft eyes as if butter would not melt in her mouth.

And then the rest of that evening? How they made Algy cook the coffee and burn his fingers over the lamp, and nearly upset the boiling liquid into the Wee Widow's lap. How

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they then rowed ashore and landed on the pier to find themselves in the midst of a madding whirl of 'Arrys and 'Arriets in all their seaside glory. How they paced up and down under the gaslight while the Red Marine Band, under the magic wand of Mr. Miller, discoursed charming music from the interior of the flaring Casino; the three together, the two tall figures and the Wee Widow in the center, she doing the talking of course, for Dickie had turned shy again. How the former small person made fun out of all the marvelous-hued "blazers" and wonderful female yachting costumes and of the people inside them—the fat matrons in peaked yachting caps, and the young ladies in very low-cut sailor collars. Finally, how, after a while, the three thought they had had enough of dry land and betook themselves again to the water.

And then that mean little person, the Wee Widow, remembered she had a letter she *must* absolutely write, if Algy would be kind enough to post it as he went back to his quarters, and, so remembering, insisted on being deposited in the *Speck*. Algy, then, by

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a good deal of strategy and tact, retained Miss Dickie in the dingey, and what with the tide and the wind, with an occasional stroke of the oars when he was not engaged in leaning on them talking and looking into Dickie's face, they found themselves drifting away among the labyrinth of yachts and boats which made the sea almost as crowded as the pier. It was only when the band up above struck up "God Save the Queen," that it dawned upon them that the Wee Widow might possibly have finished her letter by then, and they rowed back to the *Speck*, rather shame-faced and apologetic.

She welcomed them with an innocent sweetness, offered Algy a good-night glass of ——, and then suddenly remembered that, except a little claret, the *Speck* was run on strictly teetotal principles. But I think that young man forgave her, for he wrung her hand at parting.

"Good-night," he murmured, calling the Wee Widow by her name, "and thanks *awfully!*" he added, but what for, he left for her and the reader to determine.

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## CHAPTER V.

### TO BEAULIEU: A RUN FOR IT.

RAY daylight was peeping through the tiny panes of glass which did duty as portholes in the *Speck*, when the Wee Widow was somewhat suddenly waked by a shouting of strange voices apparently close in her ear. Almost before she had time to collect her scattered senses, and recollect where she was, the tarpaulin which at night covered the cock-pit, allowing more space and air to the occupants of the cabin through the open doorway, was suddenly and roughly parted, and the metal-capped end of a great, big varnished bowsprit slowly and solemnly made its appearance, pointing to the cabin as if it meant coming in.

The Wee Widow sat up in her bunk, and fairly shrieked:

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"Dickie! John! What is it? what is it?"

Dickie started up, her long black hair streaming.

"Gracious! We're being run down!" she cried.

"All right, mum! All right, we'll clear ye! All right!" responded gruff voices of unseen persons in close proximity, and the next moment John was heard popping out of his little fo'castle like a jack-in-the-box, and tearing shoeless across the deck over the Wee Widow's head. Yet another minute, and Dickie had flung herself into an ulster and a cap, and had followed him.

The Wee Widow, torn to pieces between fright of an imminent foundering, and alarm at showing herself in *déshabille* to a daylight world, peeped furtively with an anxious face through a gap in the tarpaulin.

"Dickie, darling! What is it? What is it?"

"All right!" echoed that young person from above. "All right!" and she came down again.

"It's that big forty-ton cutter next door, dragging her anchor and nearly

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running into us, that's all," she added reassuringly.

"How impertinent!" scoffed the Wee Widow. "But—dragging her anchor. Is it blowing?" she asked.

"Fresh. And isn't it cold!" remarked Dickie, covering herself up in a blanket. "What's the time? Only half-past five? And I feel quite awake! What a bore that cutter is!" she yawned.

"Shocking bad manners! But I must say I thought we were going down. It's too early to get up, and I can't go to sleep. Happy thought! Let's make some tea."

"*Volontiers!* But it *is* blowing, though. I wonder what we had better do. John!" cried Dickie, peering out of the tarpaulin, "what do you think of the weather?"

"Can't quite say, miss," was the answer. "The wind's got up a bit, and looks like more, miss!"

"Are we all right here, do you think?" inquired the Wee Widow anxiously.

"Can't say, m' lady. You see it's t'rble holdin' ground 'ere along! And with the wind in this 'ere quarter there aint no shelter."

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"I think we'd best be off, John. Don't you, Dickie?"

"Let's run for Beaulieu before it gets any worse," suggested Dickie, hurrying into her clothes. "It's useless to think of any more sleep," she added, with a sigh.

"Bother that cutter!" ejaculated the Wee Widow; and she passed the word to "the crew" to get ready for an immediate start.

A hurried toilet, a hasty cup of tea, and the tarpaulin was taken down and rolled up over the sliding roof. There was no doubt now in the minds of either of the friends that it *was* blowing. The wind came from the northeast, and it was a cold, gray, cheerless morning, with no signs of improvement about it. The Wee Widow unlashed the tiller, and Dickie turned to John.

"What shall we put up?"

"Three reefs, miss, I think, will be as well. We don't want to get a dustin'."

And the two ladies fell to work hastily tying up the reefing ties with all speed, while John got up the jib and foresail. Dickie gave him a hand with the shortened mainsail,

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the Wee Widow stood to the helm, overboard went the moorings, and the *Speck* threaded her difficult and devious way out to sea among the crowd of craft which lay around her, many of them also preparing for flight. Behind them lay the silent pier, the deserted beach, strewn with the sandwich papers of the latest Birmingham excursion. Not a soul was visible the whole length and breadth of the sunburnt common; six o'clock chimed from the Town Hall, and *reveillé* rang out from the barracks.

The tide, running out of Portsmouth Harbor against the wind, made it lumpy. Off Gilkicker Point they began to feel the full force of the wind, the *Speck* dipping her bowsprit as she courtesied to every wave. The Wee Widow, wisely considering that weight told, gave up the tiller to Dickie, who, with her long limbs, was the better able to fix herself into a position to wrestle with it. Then a sea came over the bows, and John ran forward and took down the foresail, and the *Speck* steadied herself somewhat, but they drove along, pitching in a way which

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created, ever and again, frightful commotion in the cabin, accompanied with direful crashing, and resulting in chaos.

But no one had time to think or attend to what was going on below. Off Stokes Bay they shipped another sea, and John, agile as a cat, in his stocking feet, came aft and suggested taking in the mainsail, and in another moment or two it lay, a white mass, blocking up the deck and the cock-pit, and the little *Speck* was laboring along under a jib only.

The Wee Widow had meantime extricated the mackintoshes from the shelf in the cock-pit, and had wriggled into hers and assisted Dickie into another. That young woman stood like a rock, her back against the combings of the cock-pit, her feet wedged against the locker opposite, her yachting cap jammed over her eyes, her dark fringe flying out at a straight right angle to her face, and her cheeks tingling with such a color as she would have given worlds for in a London ballroom a month back.

"I don't like the look of the weather, do you, John?" shouted Dickie, breaking a long silence, to

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the "crew" as he stood forward, hanging on to the mast and dodging the water which swirled over the fore-part of the deck.

"It'll be worse afore it's better, miss," he replied consolingly. "But, at any rate, the tide'll be slacker by the time we get to the mouth o' Southampton Water, where we'll just feel it worst!"

The Wee Widow had not spoken for an age. She was not in the least frightened, for she came of a race which had never been known to have "nerves" since the Conquest, but she was excited and just a wee bit anxious, in addition to being decidedly wet, and emphatically ravenous. But she alternately sat curled up in as small a compass as possible at Dickie's feet, or else employed herself heroically in groveling about the cabin picking up the bits, and rescuing treasures from imminent danger. But like Brer Rabbit she "kep' on sayin' nuffin'."

At last she peered up, a rather woe-begone little face, and faltered between two waves which shook the *Speck* from stem to stern, and deluged her passengers with wet.

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"I wish we could get on a little faster before it grows worse!"

Dickie made no reply. She was feeling the intense excitement, mingled with the sense of danger and responsibility, of riding across country, and was taken up in trying to dodge the worst waves, for with only a jib up the *Speck* had but little steering way on her. She could not have carried more sail in that weather, as the sea was too rough, but she behaved gallantly, freeing herself with a shake and a plunge when the water came on board.

The "woman at the wheel" made first Calshot lightship and then Point, Calshot taking the inner channel north of the Brambles, and once across Southampton Water, which it had taken them an hour and a half to reach, though the excitement was so intense that time had flown, matters began to mend little.

Away on the left lay the mouth of the Medina, still guarded by a forest of spars. The Wee Widow planted herself with care in the cock-pit, in a position in which she could see, and yet in which she was not liable to be made a shuttlecock of.

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"Lots of people still there, see Dickie!" she exclaimed, finding her tongue at last, and beginning to "take notice," as they say of the babies. "What an age it seems since we left!"

"It seems an age since we had anything to eat," remarked Dickie; "I'm simply starving. Come and take the tiller, there's a good creature, while I go and dive for some biscuits."

"I doubt our ever finding anything any more in there," replied her companion ruefully, but doing as she was desired and accepting with gratitude the Bath clivers Dickie presently handed to her. "Why, it's past eight. How will the tide suit us for getting into Beaulieu, John?"

"Fust rate, m' lady. It's dead low water about nine, and we'll go up with the tide. I think, m' lady," he added, "we might carry a little more sail, if you'd like to try."

"Try anything that brings us nearer breakfast, John, any mortal thing you like," replied the lady; "for it's evident we can't even boil some coffee till we get into the river, can we?"

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"I don't think much of it would ever reach our mouths," laughed Dickie. "Ah!" she added, "I never realized what a rough and tumble could be before. One doesn't, in a big yacht."

"No, indeed. Look at that stately schooner, setting down to westward under a trysail. I dare say they are all sitting down to a comfortable meal now."

"Don't let's think about it," replied Dickie, as John, declining to let her come forward and help him, ran up the mainsail again, still with three reefs taken in. The wind being off the land, and the *Speck*, being now somewhat sheltered by the dark mass of the woods about Eaglehurst, was in smoother water.

"We must run on, m' lady, till we gets abreast of the coastguard station—the white one—and then make a leg in. When we gets the two beacons abreast, we're in the mouth, and it won't be difficult to make the channel at low water."

"Dickie, if you're not tired, you take her in," said the Wee Widow magnanimously. "You've borne all the burden and heat of the day; you

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shall have the glory. You've done splendidly—eh, John?"

"Indeed, the lady have, m' lady. There's not a many 'ud 'a' cared for it," replied John admiringly.

"I've enjoyed it awfully, thanks, and I'm not at all tired," replied Dickie, taking the helm again.

Under the increased sail the *Speck* made better way. Egypt Point and the wooded heights above it, Gurnard Bay and its villas, came and went slowly on the left. Dickie held on till the white coastguard cottage on the steep bank was level with their bows, and then brought the boat up to the wind. There was a bracing up of the mainsail, a flattening of the jib-sheet, and the *Speck* headed for the long straight beach which, apparently, stretched interminably on either hand with no perceptible opening. The tower of Eaglehurst rose among the trees, the finest yachting residence in the world, forever associated with the memory of Prince Batthyany, the gables of Inchmery were visible almost in front of them, but of river mouth there was no sign.

But, when Dickie had got the two

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beacons—black posts on the bank—in line, a sudden *éclaircissement* ensued. What had appeared only as part of the long shingle beach resolved itself into a bank of oozy mud with the beach itself behind it, and, between the two straggled a narrow channel, winding gradually inland. No sooner, however, had they made the beacons, than an easing off was necessary, or the *Speck* would have been ashore. Deftly, and in the nick of time, Dickie put down the helm and round came the little vessel before the wind again. Out flew the jib and the mainsail, then came a sudden lull in the wind and in the water, and the *Speck* glided up the extremely narrow river channel on an even keel and in the serenest manner possible.

It was a delicious lull after the battering and the blustering of the last few hours. On their right, high above them, rose the sharply shelving shingle beach, a lonely line of country, backed with level woods, and dotted with the white coastguard station and a solitary house. Hidden away among its trees, farther along behind them lay Inchmery, the sea-

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side residence of a well known noble yachting family, whose heir had but recently lost his life in pursuit of the family hobby—one of those pathetic tragedies which occur every now and again, and throw dark shadows over the merry life of our yachting world.

On the left, the great oozy brown bank of mud, diminishing imperceptibly with the turning tide, shut out the Solent and the view, and contributed to the general peace and calm. But there was still plenty of wind, and the *Speck* shot along swiftly. The Wee Widow had dived below, and lighted the lamp and set the kettle on to boil, there being no danger of an upset now, and was trying to reduce the chaos of the cabin to something like order.

"It seems almost wicked with this wind to lie to and get something to eat," Dickie called out, after a while, "but I really don't think I can last any longer. The wind has made me voracious!"

John heard her—"One touch of nature," etc.—and he came aft.

"Might lie to at the corner, there, miss," he remarked, pointing ahead

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to where, at a bleak coastguard station, the channel appeared to come to an abrupt end. "River turns inland there, miss, and we'll have to tack up to Buckler's Hard, which is as far up as we can take the yacht."

"And the tide will serve us to get up to—to—*whose* Hard, John?"

"Buckler's Hard, miss. Oh, yes! we'll get up, right enough."

"Very well, then, John, we'll stop at the corner, and put out a kedge, and *eat!*"

"Shall I put on the sausages?" cried the Wee Widow.

"Instantly, please," cried Dickie, "and we can begin on the cold things. I don't think I ever realized what starvation meant before!"

John smothered a grin behind his stubbly red beard, and went to the bows to prepare to let down the kedge.

A few minutes more and the *Speck* had come to the end of the long, narrow, uninteresting channel parallel to the sea, and reached the corner where the river proper wound down from among the woods on either side. A fair and peaceful vista of calm meadows and umbrageous

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banks opened before them, but the only sign of civilization was the exceedingly ugly coastguard station, black this time, by way of a change, standing sentinel over the muddy spit, and whence issued barefooted water-babies, who ran out into the ooze to watch the advent of the little vessel.

Down went the sails, overboard the anchor, to an accompaniment of rattling chain. Dickie made fast the tiller, sniffing the while the aroma of the coffee ascending deliciously from below.

"Why, there's another channel, John," she exclaimed, pointing to a cut in the mud spit, opposite the coastguard station. "Could we have come in that way?"

"Tw'orn't a-been easy, miss, blowin' as it dew outzide."

"Perhaps not," replied the young lady, glancing at an ominous black skeleton of a vessel which lay rotting on the mud. "But we'll try and get *out* that way when we come down again. It will save us a good bit, going west, you see."

With which she disappeared. A few minutes later and you would

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have thought the *Speck* a deserted vessel, for not a sign of life was visible on her deck, not a sound of voice came up either from the tiny fo'castle or little cabin. Everyone was too busily engaged eating to talk.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE "KING'S FAIR PLACE."

THE tide was running in fast, and rapidly diminishing the height of the oozy bank and the broad expanse of mud flats ere the crew of the *Speck* bethought themselves of getting up the mainsail again and starting on their upward and inland journey. The wind had moderated, but it blew from the same quarter, a wrong one for the course they were now pursuing. They had to tack steadily all the way.

It was a pleasant run. They seemed to have left the sea, faintly beating on the beach, far, far behind them. The river of the Beautiful Spot sauntered down to meet it at a leisurely pace, embraced with wide, wildwood—here of beech, here of fir, dotting the landscape like shadows, all part of the Great Forest which

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has been ever since the days of the conquering William. There was not a cottage, not a steeple visible. For this is a lone promontory between the Solent and Southampton Water, in the hands of two or three great land-owners, and as jealously guarded for sport, almost, as in the time of Rufus. Not another craft of any kind did they meet, though the beautiful winding river is navigable for large yachts for some seven miles from its mouth. Only the wild white swans put out from their harborage among the reeds to meet and greet the advancing *Speck*, with ruffled plumage and low hiss, while overhead an occasional heron winged its slow way across the stream to a lonely marshy meadow on the bank.

The ladies were, to say the truth, both of them a little tired. As they left the anchorage the Wee Widow had taken the helm for a while, only to be detected by Dickie in surreptitious yawns and most unmistakable noddings.

"It's the wind, dear, makes one sleepy."

"And you are not used to getting up quite so early," added Dickie,

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taking the tiller from her. "Go and lie down."

"I won't," remonstrated the little lady. "I shall go to sleep in a moment, which would be a wicked shame, among these beautiful curves and reaches, each one lovelier than the other, and which I've wanted to see for years!"

"Go about!" cried Dickie to John, as the *Speck* shot ominously near the green meadow.

"I know," exclaimed the Widow. "If you won't let me steer or work the ropes, I'll get the guidebook and read to you about Beaulieu Abbey. It's most interesting."

"By all means," replied Dickie. "Go about!"

The Wee Widow rummaged for the guidebook. She found it with some difficulty, and arranged her small person with care in a snug corner of the cock-pit beneath Dickie's feet, where she could have one eye on the scenery. The former then waited for some time for the topographical information to be imparted to her. But it came not. In the intervals, now becoming shorter in duration, but more frequent, during which she had

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attention to spare from the "going about," for the river was growing narrower and more winding, Dickie looked down on her companion. The fair-haired little head reposed against the pale blue Liberty cushion, the guidebook had fallen from her hand. The Wee Widow was making up for her abbreviated night.

"Here we are at Buckler's Hard!" was the exclamation of Dickie, which roused her companion from her slumbers. John added his little mite in the shape of a fantasia on the chain as he let down the anchor, a noise sufficient to waken the Seven Sleepers.

The Wee Widow opened her blue eyes upon an ancient black double jetty with a slip and a gravely strand, or "hard," between its two arms. Beyond it, across a meadow, rose two parallel lines of very towny looking houses, huddled together, as if for a company, in this out-of-the-world spot, and surveying each other across a sort of green, at the farther end of which a road, apparently, led out somewhere or other.

"Who's Buckler?" asked the

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Widow, rather sleepily and incoherently.

"Who's Griffiths? The safe man," echoed Dickie vaguely. Then she turned to John. "Will she do here, do you think?"

"Lie nicely, miss; just mid stream, zo we can get to her any tide."

"I must have been asleep a little, I think," said the Wee Widow, in the half apologetic tone people use when detected in diurnal slumbers.

"Only all the prettiest part of the run up," responded Dickie maliciously.

"Dickie, you're just horrid! I'll —I'll—I'll tell you what I'll do to you. I shall insist on our sleeping to-night at the Beaulieu Arms Hotel. The guidebook says—I was just beginning it—'Rebuilt recently and replete with all modern conveniences. I think a night in a real bedroom would be glorious," she added, smothering a yawn.

"It certainly will not be exactly a balmy one if we spend it lying here at low tide in a ditch in the mud," responded Dickie, "and from what I see of Buckler's Hard I fancy we

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shall soon have exhausted its charms," she added.

"Such a God-forsaken looking sort of place, neither village nor town, and plumped down on this sweet spot," said the Widow, with a shudder. "By all means let us get on up to Beaulieu. But first some tea."

"We've skipped a meal to-day, methinks," said Dickie. "But never mind, we'll have a *real* dinner at Beaulieu, and not have to cook it! So put on the kettle, and after tea I'll row you up to Beaulieu in the dingey, and we'll do the Abbey. Don't forget that guidebook."

They sent John ashore for fresh milk and new bread, neither of which commodities had they been able to procure before their matutinal and hurried start from Southsea. Buckler's Hard boasted a "general shop," kept in one of the "towny" houses with the pedimented doorways. John poked his head over the half door into an apartment smelling of a combined fragrance of cheese and soap and bacon and candles, and purchased a loaf. But milk was evidently an unattainable luxury. It often is in the most rural places.

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The Wee Widow had to dilute her tea with lacteal fluid of the tin tinny.

After tea the dingey was brought forward, the poor, patient, buffeted dingey, which, with much labor and many a heavy blow, had followed in the wake of the *Speck* through all the rough water, *nolens volens*, and the ladies packed themselves and a hand-bag and, last, but not least, Nip, into it. The joy of the latter at escaping from the *Speck* was unbounded. He planted himself in the bows of the boat, his paws on the gunwale, and barked defiantly at an inquisitive white swan out of mere overflow of spirits.

The sun was sinking low over the New Forest, and the tide was on the turn in the over-brimming river as Dickie took the oars and pushed off from the yacht. On either side the river, winding almost as much as does the Dart, the woods came down to the water's edge and the trees overhung the stream. To the west, beyond the steep bank, but hidden by the greenery, lay St. Leonard's Farm, the sheep-farm of the great Cistercian monastery, its massive barn still existing, and the Beufre, or

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Bouverie (the ox-farm), still retaining its ancient name. The deep green shadows fell across the Exe, giving mysterious depth to the banks beneath the trees, where the stately Osmunda Regalis feathered damp places, and the sea aster and sea lavender grew, lapped by each rising tide. The Beaulieu district is famous for its wild flowers. It was a peaceful close to a stormy day.

At last, round a wide reach, the mill pond opened into view, and beyond it, in green meadows, the Abbey ruins and the great gatehouse of Beaulieu Palace, backed by fine wych elms and Queen Margaret's Tower.

Dickie tied up the dingey to the weir bridge, which divides the wide lake forming the mill-head from the mill-pond reach below, stretching away like molten silver in the departing light of day among the green woods. The mill wheel was silent, and a great calm seemed to rest over the spot.

"An oasis in a waste of desolate heaths," murmured the Wee Widow, as she leant over the parapet of the bridge and drank in the scene.

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"The old religious knew what they were about."

"We could not have found a greater change after this morning's dusting," exclaimed Dickie.

"And if we find it restful, what of poor Margaret of Anjou and Anne, the King-maker's wife, when they simultaneously fled here from Southampton and Weymouth, after the disaster of Barnet? Or Perkin Warbeck, of ignominious fame, skulking hither and deserting his allies at Exeter? Poor Margaret! Often afterward, in the Tower of London, must she have looked back on her stay in the turret yonder, still called by her name, where she found shelter with her brave, ill-fated boy. The 'King's Fair Place' was a great refuge in evil times, a snug retreat, doubtless, well out of the way in those days. At the 'dissolution' there were some thirty 'sanctuary men' and their families living here. A nice climate, too. Behind the church there are ruins of a wine press, and early in the last century the Duke of Montagu is said to have made his own brandy from vines growing here."

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"As I have no doubt the good fathers did before him. It must have been a huge monastery. See the great ivy-covered walls running across the meadows to the right there."

"The Abbey Church is judged, from the remains of the walls and the pavement, to have been as large as Winchester Cathedral; but it has been well 'dissolved.' They understood the art of pulling down quite as well as that of building in the days of the great Harry, and the stone was carted away to build Hurst Castle, and the lead used for Calshot Castle."

"But there *is* the church, that severe, long building with the little wooden bell turret and shingle roof."

"Midway between the broken arches and ivy-grown walls and the sharp-outlined Jacobean manor house, with its trim flower beds. What a contrast! No, that is the old refectory, now the parish church. See, it stands north and south. How unusual! We will up betimes tomorrow and explore. It's getting too dark now, and there is still much

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to see of King John's great foundation."

"King John? One doesn't associate him with church building."

"No, indeed, and, if the legend be true about the origin of Beaulieu Abbey, he was only driven to such extravagance by his own bad conscience. He had been bullying all the Cistercian Abbots he had gathered together to meet him at Lincoln, they hoping for some favor, and he ordering them to be trodden to death under horses. But they fled, and the king had a nightmare. He dreamt that at the Day of Judgment the Abbots were ordered to scourge him; and so vivid was the dream that, when he awoke, he declared he could still feel the stripes upon his back."

"Rheumatism, no doubt, caught in his incessant wanderings up and down the face of the country."

"Anyhow, he was advised to apologize to the monks, and to expiate the offense he had meditated to them. So he built Beaulieu and endowed it richly. It was not finished, though, till forty-two years after, in Henry III.'s reign, who came

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to its dedication with great pomp. It was built of limestone from Binstead quarries, near Ryde, carried, so tradition says, across the Solent at low tide."

"There is a tradition that such a ford existed in Roman times from Gurnard Bay, and that they carried the tin across it to ship from Chale, on the far side of the island. But it was not much like a ford this morning!"

"Let's forget this morning and go and order beds and dinner at the Beaulieu Arms. I am sure *you* must be tired. You have had no nap, and we were up so early this morning—and so late last night, eh?"

Dickie started and grew red, as if suddenly struck by some memory. The Wee Widow eyed her curiously, and linked her arm in hers tenderly.

"No, I'm not tired, thank you," demurred Dickie. "And it's such a lovely evening that it seems a shame to go indoors."

"A nicer evening than last night, eh?" inquired her companion maliciously.

Dickie tossed her head and vouchsafed no reply.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### HOW PRIDE HAD A FALL.

A QUIET morning after the wind of the day before; a gray, sunless day, but the great sheet of water above Beaulieu Bridge lying calm like a mirror of molten silver. The Wee Widow had thoroughly enjoyed her night on terra firma and was as fresh as paint. Dickie, on the other hand, was just a trifle tired looking and *distraite*.

"She's feeling yesterday's dusting. I ought not to have let her steer so long. It was too hard work," the Wee Widow said to herself, forgetful that Dickie, with her magnificent physique, had never been known to knock up in her life.

After breakfast they went across to the Palace. The family were away in Scotland, but the mention of the Wee Widow's name procured them admit-

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tance through the gate-house, the old water gate of the monks, and into the Prince Abbot's Palace itself. When Thomas Wriothesley was granted the Abbey at the Dissolution he turned it into a square mansion, the figure of the Virgin, to whom it was dedicated, still remaining in the front. Early in the last century the first Duke of Montagu fortified it against the French privateers that he imagined would steal up the river, and dug a moat round it. Across this the Wee Widow and Dickie passed on a bridge, and entered the Abbot's ancient hall, with its delicately groined stone roof, and thence upstairs, to examine the old wood carving and early decorated window in the first floor. Dickie looked thence on the quiet scene, the gay flower-beds, the never-filled moat, the trees overhanging the placid river, and beyond, the mill and the trim village. The Wee Widow imagined her to be admiring the picture, but Dickie suddenly turned upon her with the inquiry:

"There's hardly any wind up here; I hope there will be more at sea, or we shan't get far on our way to Poole, eh?"

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"Poole, oh, yes! Ah! I'd forgotten all about Poole and the *Speck* and the sea. I was back in the Middle Ages."

Dickie gave a mysterious low laugh.

"If anything, I was in the future. Come, let's go and 'do' the abbey."

They passed through the grounds to the north, under the lofty Scotch firs, and among the clipped hedges which lead to the large walled kitchen garden, and then out into the site of the great abbey church, now completely swept and garnished. Only here and there a ruined foundation, or a bit of the encaustic pavement, now feet below the surface, serve to indicate the size and beauty of the grand pile, built upon the lines of Winchester Cathedral, but with the very uncommon east ending of an apse. To the south a gate opened suddenly into the ruins of the cloisters, a square court with the ivy-green walls and arches still partially standing, and inclosing the final resting-place of the brethren.

The Wee Widow, after a little time spent in photographing different points, had sat herself down in a stone seat in a recess in the wall,

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where doubtless many a white-robed Carthusian had reposed before her, reading, or engaged in contemplation, for the rule of the order was very severe, and Beaulieu was a well-conducted monastery. Across the green sward rose the delicate arches which are all that is left of the Chapter House, the slender polished black Purbeck pillars having vanished. In a little green square by the Chapter House lie the Abbots' graves, and among them the tiny flower-decked mound of an infant Montagu, resting in long-consecrated ground, not far from the tomb of a king's sister-in-law, wife of the Third Henry's brother, in front of where the high altar stood; a spot now marked by a wooden cross standing upright on the carefully trimmed grass.

Suddenly Dickie came and sat down abruptly beside her. She stole her arm round the Wee Widow's waist and drew her toward her.

"I've something to tell you, darling."

"Say on," replied the other innocently, as if she did not guess what was coming.

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"It's been lying a dead weight on my mind for thirty-six hours! I wonder indeed the *Speck* sailed as well as she did, with the additional ballast. It's being worrying me so, and I've been longing to tell you—yet somehow there never seemed a quiet moment till now. How nice and still it is here! I think I understand why the women of old took the veil."

"Do you indeed, Dickie? It's more than I do, then. And you, *mon amie*, are the last person on earth to have a vocation. Proceed."

"It would save a lot of trouble—save the making up of one's mind. You see, dear old girl, Algy—Algy—spoke to me—that evening at Southsea."

"Oh, he did, did he?"

"You don't seem surprised?"

"Were you?"

"Yes—no—I mean, a little. I feel sorry somehow that it's all over and must be settled one way or the other. It was very nice. And then to choose such a place! Boat-loads of 'Arrys and 'Arriets all round, probably saying the same thing."

"It's a thing that's been said and

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answered ever since the world began. Well, and what *did* you answer?"

"Well, that's just it—the bother of it all is that I *didn't* answer—I couldn't."

"Rather hard on Algy, wasn't it?"

"Perhaps, but I didn't mean to be, I'm sure. I wouldn't for worlds, indeed I wouldn't! But he said he'd wait a century if I'd only give him a little hope."

"They always say that."

"So I said I'd think it over and let him know when we meet in Poole Harbor. That wasn't hard on him, was it? I meant to be nice, *very* nice; indeed I did. But I want time to think—to think," added the girl, brushing her hair wearily off her forehead. "Life seems as if it would never be the same again!"

"It never is," murmured the Wee Widow softly:

> "Standing with reluctant feet,
> Where the brook and river meet;
> Womanhood and childhood fleet.
> Morning rises into noon
> May glides onward into June.

"Come, time is getting on," she added, rising and drawing Dickie's arm into hers. "John said we must

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start down about midday, and we have much yet to see. Here the good brethren used to sit and read Eadmer the Monk's 'Life of Anselm and of Wilfred,' the Fathers on the poetry of the Old Testament, and that popular religious novel, translated into every European language, 'S. John Damasceus on the Acts of Barlaam and Josaphat,' whoever they were. The catalogue of the library has come down to us. And now, let us to the dormitory and the great cellars."

These are in good preservation at Beaulieu, having been used as a farmhouse. The sick ward, with its roof of sweet chestnut where the cobwebs never hang, is to be seen at one end of the dormitory, with a fireplace still existing. There are remains of a passage where the monks trooped down at night to say Matins and Lauds. The vast cellars are full of carefully collected fragments of parts of pillars, capitals, and bits of carving, all reverently gathered together and treasured there.

But the refectory of the abbey, preserved as the parish church, is naturally the most interesting portion of

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the ruins, and thither, finally, the two wandered. A long, plain building, standing north and south, lit by lancet windows filled with modern glass, but the south exterior end disfigured by an ugly buttress, placed there by the Vandal restorers of the last century to support the "wagon" roof.

"Here's nice iron scroll work on the door, ancient too," remarked the Widow, as they passed in at the north end, for she devotes much of her leisure to the latest craze in amateur art labor, and bent-iron work, which hurt her fingers not a little, was her most recent production. So the Wee Widow hastily drew out her sketchbook and jotted down an idea of the design.

"And what curious carvings on the intersection of the roof," she continued, as they entered the church from below the ugly gallery at the end. "Abbots' heads, angels, a thirteenth century headdress, a crowned head—that must be the King of the Romans, Henry III.'s brother's, whose wife Eleanor was buried in the church. And the monk's original painting, too, care-

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fully restored. But come, come, Dickie, here is the pulpit, the glory of the church."

"How quaint! Jutting out from the wall, and little stone stairs to get up, in the thickness of the wall."

And Dickie stepped lightly up the well-worn little stone stairs, her sailor hat flitting under the ribbed arches between the double row of black Purbeck marble pillars, past the painted windows with the painted saints, and finally looked down upon the Wee Widow from the bird's-nest stone pulpit, elaborately carved.

"Only, unfortunately, it was not a pulpit at all," remarked that little person, looking critically up from below. "This was the refectory, the dining hall, recollect, and that was the rostrum, whence a brother read good books during dinner to prevent the monks talking at meals. Don't you remember:

"And the reader droned from the pulpit, like the murmur of many bees,
The legend of good St. Dunstan or St. Basil's homilies."

"There is a pulpit just like it at Magdalen, Oxford. Have you forgotten?'

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"I chiefly remember the Magdalen Ball at Commem," laughed Dickie, descending. "But this is very quaint and pretty, only time's getting on. Don't you think it would be as well to go and have some lunch, and then I'll row you down to the yacht."

"And so on to Poole," added the Wee Widow, smiling. "Proceed, I follow," and she went out and began whistling for Nip, who had no sympathy with his mistress's archæological researches, in which he was forbidden to accompany her.

An hour later and the dingey, propelled by Dickie's sturdy strokes, was shooting round the bend of the broad mill pond, and that oasis in the New Forest, that historical patch of man's handiwork, amid miles of wild nature, the "King's Fair Place" and its green meadows, faded from view.

John had spent a happy morning on the *Speck* working his wicked will upon her. The sails had been put up to dry, the deck scrubbed till you might have eaten your dinner off it, as the saying goes, and every scrap of brass, every plate and

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tumbler polished until it shone again.

"Beggin' yer pardin', m' lady, but I thinks as if you'r' ready we'd best make a start at once. The tide's with us, yer see, but the wind's that light we shall have as much as we can do to reach Yarmouth to-night."

So up went the sails and the anchor, and once more the *Speck* was free. The wind was indeed so light that it was chiefly on the tide that she relied to take her down the devious and fast narrowing windings of the river. Patience is a great thing in every circumstance of life, but never is it more required than on a sailing boat. Dickie never seemed to mind much, sailing was sailing to her. She cared more for the actual sailing than for the places where she arrived at. On the other hand the Wee Widow fretted slightly over slow work like that of to-day. Though she enjoyed the being at sea, she was always glad to be getting somewhere, to be exploring fresh inland scenes and pastures new, and chafed at the delay.

"Poor Buckler's Hard," she said

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apologetically, as the last pile of the black pier of that melancholy looking spot disappeared from view behind a tree-fringed promontory they were rounding. "I am sorry I maligned it yesterday. I find that I was unkind to something down in the world—that had seen better days—most reprehensible."

"Have you discovered who Buckler was, then?" inquired her companion.

"No, *his* identity is still buried in mystery. But my faithful guide-book informs me that the delectable looking settlement that bears his name was laid out as a town for sugar-refining in the middle of the last century by the then Duke of Montagu, who had West Indian property, which he afterward lost when St. Lucia was declared neutral in the treaty of 1748, and the works here were in consequence abandoned. The Hard, however, grew into importance again as a shipbuilding place during the great wars. They even built seventy-four gun frigates here!"

"It must have been lively on the

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river then, and how grand the tall sailing vessels must have looked, stalking out on the tide."

"Like Turner's pictures of Portsmouth Harbor. I do so regret I didn't know the Solent a hundred years ago. How crowded and picturesque it must have looked with the three-deckers in full sail! Now, at a review, Spithead is filled up with drab-colored saucepans lying on the water. But it had its disadvantages from an artist's point of view. The shipbuilding at Buckler's Hard cleared the neighborhood of all the big oak trees which once covered this part of the Forest."

"And Portsmouth dockyard did the same for the Isle of Wight, and Milford Haven for the Welsh coasts. Early in this century, I've been told, the ——s were offered by government eighty thousand pounds for a splendid oak wood up the Aeron Valley. They declined, but would gladly now take as many hundreds for it. Heighho! we hardly move. Scratch the mast, there's a dear, or whistle for the wind."

"And wake Nip from sweet dreams of rats? Never?"

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And so on leisurely to the corner at Neas Point.

"I'm weary of mud," cried Dickie. "It's the bane of yachting on our coasts. Look around at these hideous surroundings of oozy banks. How lovely the stream would be if it could be always full!"

"Artists love the mud," remonstrated the Widow. "The changing lights and tones of an uncovered estuary are most fascinating. Think of some of Adrian Stokes's pictures!"

"Think of some bits in the Mediterranean—the olive-fringed shores, lapped ever by the blue sea on the dark rocks——"

"And of the smell of Marseilles and all the other tideless ports!" added the Wee Widow, with a shudder at the reminiscences she invoked. "Come and have tea."

"Not going to try the cut by Neas Point, eh, miss?" inquired John, as Dickie came back to the helm, the nearest possible approach to a wink his manners would permit, in the Saxon blue eye which showed his "Darset" origin.

"Not to-day, I think, John," re-

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plied the young lady. "It does not look inviting."

"Well, then, miss, we must just tack down the channel mouth agin the wind. It's running like a mill-dam now, miss, so don't hold on too near them booms."

And then again began the chorus of "lee ho," "'bout ship," "go about," repeated constantly as the little vessel zigzagged down between the single beach and the mud spit, guided by the gaunt row of sticks that marked the channel, making the most of every puff of wind and every inch of tide.

"This is what I like," cried Dickie exultingly. "This is as much an art as painting mud flats, and a healthier amusement into the bargain. See how she answers to my slightest touch. See, I steer her as I should ride a horse, with a light hand, judgment, and——"

"Look out, miss. There's a tongue runs out 'tween this boom and the basket boom," continued John.

"Humph!" remarked the Wee Widow, a faint smile hovering about her little mouth. "Shall I send for

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one of the trumpeters from the Scilly Islanders? Methinks he is needed, Dickie."

"Ha!" The *Speck* interrupted them all by stopping short on the aforesaid tongue with a tremble which vibrated throughout her whole length, while there followed a slow grinding sound, which sent Dickie's heart into her mouth.

"We've grounded!" shrieked the Wee Widow, stopping short in the act of drying a teacup, duster in hand.

"Git forrard, miss!" shouted John, in an agony of excitement. "Git forrard, m' lady!" and he put the helm down hard, while the two ladies ran to the bow to lighten the yacht at the stern; but she did not budge.

In another moment, John, giving up the attempt to sheer her off, had abandoned the tiller and was hauling down the mainsail with all speed, Dickie, shamefaced and silent, helping him all she knew.

The *Speck* had answered to her helm but for a moment, to swing leisurely round, her bowsprit pointing into the channel. John backed

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the sails, loosing the sheets, and drawing the foresail and jib to the other side. But all in vain. The yacht did not stir.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" wailed the Wee Widow. "Here we shall stick for hours!"

And she wrung her hand and a wet tea-cloth simultaneously.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### A FRIEND IN NEED: TO YARMOUTH.

DICKIE and the Wee Widow looked at each other with faces expressive of the greatest annoyance. John's, on the contrary, exhibited no concern over this unexpected disaster. He came forward smothering a smile in his red beard, and remarked sardonically:

"Lucky for us that there's the *Bulldog* handy, m' lady."

Both the ladies glanced up immediately to where he pointed at a little steamer hovering about in front of the river mouth. A deep flush overspread Dickie's face, and the Wee Widow stamped her little foot and gnashed her teeth.

"What crushing luck! We shall never hear the end of this," she exclaimed, between her teeth, in accents of the deepest annoyance.

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Dickie, the practical, shrugged her shoulders.

"We shall have to put up with it. Hadn't we better get a line out to them, and get them to give us a pull off, John?" she inquired.

"The sooner the better, miss, while we *can* get off," rejoined the latter, and, in less time than it takes to tell, John had unfastened the painter, had stepped into the dingey, and was rowing off to the *Bulldog* with all speed. The latter, warned by the abrupt stoppage of the little *Speck*, and the hasty lowering of her mainsail of what had probably taken place, steamed cautiously up the channel to the corner to within about twenty yards of the yacht. The Skipper was visible in the bows, the inevitable eyeglass in his eye, and pipe in his mouth. When the steamer stopped, and a rope was thrown over to John in the dingey, he lifted his hat to the ladies, quite gravely, though they guessed the twinkle that must be lurking in his eyes and under his mustache. But both were too indignant with themselves, and, also, woman-like, with him for finding them in this predica-

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ment, to deign to utter a word, and returned his salute with equal gravity.

Then John stepped on board, made fast the line to the deck through the hawser-hole, while Dickie put away the dingey at the stern again; then the *Bulldog* steamed ahead, the line attached to her stern. In a minute or two there came a tug and a pull to the *Speck*, she ground her way off the mud, the ladies standing forward to lighten her stern, and John at the tiller, and in a few yards she was safely in the channel again, being dragged after the *Bulldog*.

The tall figure and the short one stood motionless together on the little deck of the *Speck*, forward, while this performance was going on, the Skipper surveying them from the stern of the steamer within a few yards. Not a word passed between them.

When the yacht was quite clear, Dickie fell to work again. She took the tiller from John, while the latter ran up the mainsail, and cast off the tug line. But it was impossible for the Wee Widow to sulk for long. She remained forward, a captivating little figure in her trim blue serge;

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and when the *Bulldog*, waiting on the yacht, was abreast her, she could not resist calling out:

"Oh, Skipper, however did you turn up like this?"

"Humph," remarked the Skipper, removing his pipe from his mouth, and lifting his cap. "I thought you weren't going to say 'thank you.'"

"I'm sorry," penitently rejoined the Wee Widow at the top of her voice. "I'm really grateful, indeed we are! We might have stuck in that ugly place for hours. But *do* tell me, how *did* you turn up?"

"Well, you see, it's been blowing a little, and I heard at Southsea from Algy that you'd gone off in the teeth of the wind, so I've just been on the lookout for you hereabouts. Didn't want to lose the *Speck*, you see; nice little boat, eh?"

"Delightful! We *are* so happy. Had a night at the hotel last night."

"And this is our first *contretemps*, I assure you," put in Dickie from the helm. "Quite an accident, believe me. We manage her beautifully."

"Can I do anything for you—provisions—water—wine?"

"A newspaper, and we'll bless you.

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And another cake?" asked the Widow slyly.

"They don't grow on the *Bulldog*. Where are you off to?"

"Never you mind."

"Shall I give you a tug anywhere?"

"Never! never!" rejoined both ladies stoutly. "With this tide there's just enough wind to take us along," added Dickie, and edged off the steamer as far as she could, and took a course down Channel.

"I really don't think you're fit to be trusted alone," began the Skipper scornfully. But the Wee Widow tossed her head at him disdainfully, and disappeared into the cabin. Dickie waved a parting adieu, and the *Speck* was soon out of speaking distance.

For some time there was silence on board the yacht, Both Dickie and the Wee Widow were crestfallen and mortified. Their course lay mid-channel, and there was nothing particularly interesting to do or see. It was lucky the tide was with them, for the wind, light from the E. all day, and veering to S. E. as the evening drew on, almost fell altogether.

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Presently the Wee Widow made tea, which revived their spirits, being women, and loosened their tongues. There was little to admire in the distant coast line on either side, to the north, straight and dark, with the gloom of the New Forest, and trending away up to the Lymington River; to the South, bold with the outline of the Island Downs. They passed vessels, yachts returning to Cowes after a cruise, steamers of all sorts, and, once, there was a temporary excitement as a great Brazil mail steamer stalked past them, her deck crowded with eager passengers homeward-bound up Southampton Water.

The evening shadows lengthened across the summer sky in that quiet manner that betokens fine weather. The sun sank in a glory of crimson and gold behind the Downs, looming ever larger and darker in contrast to the calm sea, still bright.

"The weather's hardenin' agin, miss," remarked John.

> "The evening red and morning gray
> Are sure signs of a fine day,
> But the evening gray and morning red
> Make the sailor shake his head,"

replied Dickie.

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"And then we didn't get no rain yesterday, miss," continued John, "and—

"When rain comes afore wind—halyards, sheets, and braces mind;
When wind comes afore rain—zoon you may make zail again."

"The wind is getting up a bit as the sun goes down. Shall we have enough to stem the tide with?"

"Just about, miss. It often does in fair weather."

"The sunset's lovely, and so is the evening, but I'm thinking about dinner," put in the Widow. "Crawling along like this, there is no knowing when we'll get in."

And she disappeared to concoct savory meats over the spirit lamp, which she presently invited Dickie to descend and partake of.

When they went on deck again the world had grown very dark. Lights were twinkling on shore and on sea, and John had run up the *Speck's* side lights too. The great red and green stars of a steamer occasionally shone out in the darkness, moving swiftly past them, while the vessel itself caused a perceptible swell, and making the Wee Widow, who had taken

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the helm while John went below to get some supper, feel helpless to get out of their way, if needs be, in the light wind.

"If I have such a thing as *fear* at sea it is that of being run down," remarked Dickie, prone upon the counter behind her cousin.

> "When three lights I see ahead,
> I port my helm and show my red.
> *Red* to *red* and *green* to *green*,
> Go ahead, it's all serene."

murmured the Wee Widow. "Those are blessed words of comfort, like 'Mesopotamia,' as the old woman told her pastor! All the same, I thought we *were* being run into yesterday morning."

"Of course it's the great danger at sea with these tiny boats. The weakest always goes to the wall," replied Dickie, turning to John, who had popped his head, with his mouth full, out of his hatchway to see how near the Yarmouth lights were. "Have you ever been run into, John?"

"Run *down*, miss," replied the latter grimly, "when I was aboard the ——." And he mentioned the name of a yacht whose appalling

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catastrophe had shocked the world some years before.

"What! were you in *that?*" cried the Wee Widow.

"Zure I wur', m' lady. My uncle was drowned, and the poor young lady, too; we found her wrapped up in the mainsail."

"And you, John?" asked both ladies at once.

"I got caught in some of the gear, m' lady, but I managed to kick myself free as we went down. Howsumever, I thought it was 'lights out' with me that time!"

"It was a dreadful business," murmured the Wee Widow. "If you will go ninety miles an hour in a steam yacht——"

"An old sea-cap'n, as I knew, m' lady," interposed John, "allers carried a loaded gun on board, to shoot the fust fellar as run into 'im, he sez!"

Then there followed a silence, while the red light at the end of Yarmouth Pier grew larger and larger, and the gas-lights on the little quay became distinct in the gloom. A little care was needed in getting into the harbor, and in avoiding the shoal

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ground round the Black Rock. But Miss Dickie was on her mettle. She got the green and red gas-lights on the quay in line and took the *Speck* in safely, and they dropped anchor in the river a short distance from the quay.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### UNDER THE PURBECK HILLS.

DICKIE awoke and thoughtfully tapped the barometer which hung over her head.

"At sea with low and falling glass,
Soundly sleeps a careless ass.
Only while it's high and rising,
Truly rests a careful wise one,"

she murmured softly.

"Who are you calling names?" asked her companion, awakening at the same moment.

"No one," rejoined Dickie. "I'm in a heavenly frame of mind, and so is the glass. It's going to be a jolly day, and——"

"We're bound for Poole Harbor, eh?" put in the Widow slyly.

"Oh! my dear, if you only knew how I dread it!" gasped Dickie.

"Would you like to give it up and turn eastward?"

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"Not for worlds!" cried Dickie, flushing a rosy red.

"How incoherent and inconsistent you girls are!" grumbled the Widow, as she proceeded to rise and dress.

The old, old town of Eremuth, or Ereume, as it is called in its Norman charters, lay basking in the morning sunshine. It is reduced in size considerably since the Plantagenet and Tudor days, when it was twice burnt by the French, who destroyed the church and carried off three of the bells, which still exist at Cherbourg, bearing the inscription of "*Ereume* I. of W." In the great reform of 1832 it lost its two members, chosen by the nine electors! Even its "free trade" of Georgian days, abundantly testified to by the secret recesses and subterranean passages and hearthstones arranged as trap-doors found in its old houses, has vanished. The mansion of the Governor of the Island, where Sir Robert Holmes twice entertained the Merry Monarch, who stretched his hands over the identical iron railings to be kissed by his faithful subjects, and who presented the borough with

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the mayoral mace, is degraded to the "George Inn."

It was a lovely morning, with the gray blue sky indicative of fine weather, and stately, stationary, cotton-wool-like clouds flecking it. The *Speck* stole out of Yarmouth harbor at 9 A. M., for she had a twenty-mile run before her, and though the wind was northeast, and plenty of it, it was essential to save the tide all the way, if possible. So up went the mainsail while "'Arry" was still at rest, and ere the tourist coaches had begun to think about driving out toward the Laureate's winter home "under the ridge of a noble down, or the excursion steamer had landed the tipper on the quay."

Under the green cliffs and the forts, past Fort Victoria, lying a red patch on the water's edge, opposite Hurst Castle, with its memories of the unhappy Charles I., frowning across the narrow channel, where the tide boiled and swirled under the little vessel. Then the red villas of Totland Bay among the green hills laughed in the morning sunlight, which lighted up the white cliff and pillars of the Needles, tower-

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ing in front. Past Alum Bay, such a sudden and complete change in coloring after the green shores of the inland sea. To the north the chingles, uncovered at low water. Away beyond them the coast line vanishing abruptly, trending inland, the sheer cliffs of the Needles suddenly left behind too, the rollers growing more distinct, even on that fine summer's day, with the sea spreading out wide and glittering around. The *Speck* was out in the English Channel.

It was a delicious sensation. There was a light but steady wind, enough to send the *Speck* along merrily, heeling over in the most sportsmanlike manner, with topsail set and well-filled mainsail.

"You dear little boat!" exclaimed the Wee Widow tenderly, as she glanced up at the stiff canvass and along at the prancing bows. "We'll take the greatest care of you; the Skipper needn't fear."

Dickie threw a covert look at her companion and suppressed a smile.

"Bother the Skipper!" she remarked presently. "That he should have been there at that moment!

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And yet we couldn't have done without him."

"Like Angus and his mate in the story Angus told us up at Kirkdrowsie last autumn. Angus is a fisherman, you know, and we sometimes go and fish with him in the bay when we are tired of the moors. Well, he and his mate were taking their boat home in a fog, and didn't know where on earth they were. 'Say a prayer, mon,' says Angus to his mate, 'I hae me doubts we're amang the rocks.' After some demur down goes Hamish on his knees diffidently at the bottom of the boat, whence Angus presently rouses him with a kick. 'We're ashore now, mon, ye needn't be layin' yoursel' under any further obleegation!'"

"Well, we've laid ourselves under an *obleegation* to the Skipper!" laughed Dickie. "It makes me mad to think about it! Come down to breakfast, and let's drown the recollection in hot coffee."

The early start and the fresh breeze of the open had developed appetites to which Dickie's culinary powers offered ample scope. There is no toying with a bit of toast and

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an egg when you have been up early and on the open sea.

When they went on deck again, leaving John to get his own breakfast and wash up, the Needles looked small behind them and the long yellow line of the Bournemouth cliffs, where the pinewoods meet the sea, stood out in the sunlight. In front the Isle of Purbeck had risen into distinctness. The white chalk pillars of Old Harry and his Wife, the counterpart of the Needles thirteen miles opposite them, were clearly visible, and the bold outline of the Dorsetshire downs.

They ran out to the buoy at the end of Christchurch Ledge, a chalk formation running out under Hengistburg Head, and did not attempt the narrower channel between it and the mainland. Then they hugged the curve of Bournemouth Bay, and passed the head of the pier.

"How pretty our English Mentone looks from the sea, all bright yellow cliffs and green pines."

"Yes. It is not a cheerful abode socially, as I found out when I went down there with Aunt Maria, to recover her of her bronchitis. They

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call it the 'convent city,' because it is all women and priests."

"You are too frivolous, Dickie," remonstrated the other. "That country over there," she continued, waving her disengaged hand toward Dorsetshire, "is what attracts me. It is as much a terra incognita to me as was Beaulieu land. Poole Harbor is so difficult, even impracticable, for any large yacht, and west of it is a roadless country of moors and lagoons, chiefly in the hands of the owners of Corfe Castle, whose ancestress held it so heroically against the Parliamentarians. Only a few years ago they made a railway across it from Wareham to Swanage, and where we lay the last summer in the *Débonnaire*, I longed to explore it. One might spend weeks prowling about Poole Harbor. But there is another place I should like to show you, not in Poole Harbor, quite. A lovely nook—we drove over to it one day from Swanage—with an exquisite Norman church. John," she cried, "Do you know Studland?"

"I lay there one afternoon, m' lady, while the comp'ny on the yacht went ashore."

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"Sailors only know the outside of the world," remarked the Wee Widow, *sotto voce*. "Can we lie there?" she added.

"Right enough, m' lady, unless it blows from the east. There's fair holding in the bottom of the bay under the Red Cliff."

"I should like to run straight across there and 'do' Studland this evening before we go into Poole," murmured the Widow, half to herself.

"And why not?" asked Dickie.

"It's for you to decide. I thought you were longing to get to Poole," remarked the other maliciously.

That was quite enough to make Dickie agree to any proposal to go anywhere else under the sun. She tossed her head angrily.

"If you bother, I shall—I shall leave you, and——"

"Get out and walk, eh?" murmured the Widow. "But think of poor Algy waiting for us at Lady Mary's, and tearing his hair on the beach."

"Let him tear. It's only a matter of time with the young men of the present day how soon they get bald."

And thus it came to pass that the

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*Speck's* nose was held on due west for Studland Bay, passing south of the Hook Sands and Poole Harbor bar.

The anchor was dropped, the sails let down and made snug in the quiet bay where, at the Red Cliff, a jutting sandstone rock clothed in green, the sand formation of the coast trending to the north, joins on to the chalk peninsula which culminates in the Old Harry, or Handfast Point. There was indeed good holding clear of the rock on a sandy but shallow bottom, and all hands piped contentedly down to lunch.

Afterward they went ashore, the Wee Widow, Dickie, Nip, and the inevitable camera, as the former scented things "to take." At the Red Cliff, the chalk downs, which formed a bold sky line above them, merged into the low sand dunes fringing the curve of the bay toward the narrow entrance of Poole Harbor, and the wide-stretched heathery country of moor and bog, glowing with rich purple, like a bit of Scotland. Dickie drew up the dingey above high-water mark on the soft sandy beach, where they dallied

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awhile shell hunting, and then the three, armed with the camera, climbed a fern-feathered gully to where the village lies embosomed in elms above the cliff. The gulley widened into a deep lane, shady with trees. From here and there, among the greenery, peeped thatched cottages of the local stone, lichen covered. Sun-bonneted women, inquisitive, came looking over their half-doors, or standing on the stone slabs which crossed the tiny brook careering down the lane and gulley to the sea. With them the Wee Widow communicated, receiving responses in the soft Dorset burr, with z's for s's and a's for o's, and with the result of obtaining a sturdy boy to carry the camera. Then they wandered on.

"It's like a village in a story-book!" exclaimed the Wee Widow enthusiastically, as an opening in the arching elms revealed a glimpse of the gables of the Manor House with peeps of a blue, blue sea beyond. "And to think that the owner of the soil will allow not a hotel or a lodging in the village! It's enough to make one turn socialist!"

The low tower of the little early

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Norman church, never finished, rises amid yews and cypresses. Once inside the Wee Widow was in ecstasy.

"St. Nicolas's of Studland," she cried—"of course it's dedicated to the sailors' saint—is equal to Iffley or Stukeley as a specimen of early Norman work," and she gazed delighted round the tiny building, so dim, so narrow, with its small windows, its thick walls and its central tower.

"It must be rather difficult to hear what is going on in the chancel, through this narrow little tower," remarked Dickie, who is practical rather than archæological. Then she fell to admiring one of the painted windows, a modern memorial window in memory of a Banks, who sleeps in a nameless grave far away from "Darset" and the Corfe Castle of his ancestors, for he fell fighting against besieging hordes at Lucknow. Anything to do with soldiers, somehow, great sailor though she is, had a strange fascination for Dickie, and while the Wee Widow was "enthoosing" about the Norman work and setting up her camera in all sorts of places to take such views as the dim-

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ness would allow her, Dickie, somewhat thoughtfully, wandered out again into the afternoon sunlight, where it mottled the churchyard through the encircling elms. Nip followed her, for Nip hates loafing. He had come ashore for a good run.

In the churchyard the Wee Widow found them, when she had had her fill of photography. It was a quiet, calm spot, and might have been a hundred miles from the sea, there among the shady trees, but for the tell-tale graves of the "harvest of the sea," the unknown strangers who sleep amid the "rude forefathers of the hamlet." Nip was recumbent, breathless, but joyous, from a glorious chase after the rectory cat. But Dickie was thoughtfully considering a double grave hard by the porch.

Among the peasants and the sailors and the smugglers and the drowned strangers, sleeps sound, after an adventurous life and sixteen years of the hardest fighting that British soldiers ever saw, a Peninsular and Waterloo hero, Sergeant Lawrence of the 40th Foot, "that invincible regiment," as Napier calls them.

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But besides his fourteen clasps and his wound from the forlorn hope at Badajoz, the runaway apprentice brought something else back with him to his Dorsetshire home—his French wife Clothilde, whom he wooed and married during that winter when the Allied Armies occupied Paris, lies beside him.

"A soldier's life and a soldier's wife, eh, Dickie?" murmured the Wee Widow very softly, creeping up unnoticed behind the tall figure.

Dickie flushed. She hated to be thought sentimental, and turned away as if annoyed at being discovered. But her companion's voice had a ring of sadness in it as she added:

"A love match, of course, and then 'through all the world she followed him,' like Tennyson's *Princess*. And they rest here together! What more can you want, child? It is not given to all."

Here Nip saved Dickie the trouble of a reply. The rectory cat had again hovered incautiously in sight, and, in an instant, he was off, and the hunting and whistling and shouting after him took both ladies out of the churchyard into the lane again, and

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they only retrieved him at the corner where two roads meet at the stump of an old stone cross, and in front of the village emporium.

The afternoon was yet young. They took a mile's tramp across the moor to the Agglestone, a lonely huge block of erratic stone, lying among the heather. Resting under its shadow Dickie admired the view and the changing afternoon lights on the far-spreading prospect of green down, blue sea, and purple moor flecked with golden patches of gorse and shadows of pine woods. But the Wee Widow poured forth guide-book lore.

"'Agglestone, evidently "heilig-stan," A. Sax., connected with Druid-ical worship.' Oh, come, this is more interesting! There is evidently a flavor of brimstone about all this corner—in spite of its peaceful ap-pearance—beginning at the Old Harry Rocks. A certain person who shall be nameless—are you listening, Dickie?—to whom is commonly at-tributed the finding of nefarious occupation for the unemployed, sat one day on the Needles and threw his night-cap at Corfe Castle, then

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a-building. It fell short and turned into the Agglestone Rock."

"What a poor shot!" remarked Dickie. "Come, let's go back to the village and get some tea somewhere, and then go for a good long walk over the downs on the other side. I want a tramp."

As regarded the tea "Barkis was willin'," and an old lady at the village shop, the door half hidden by a huge fuchsia and hydrangea, was found to supply it. But, as regarded the tramp, the Wee Widow demurred. She let Dickie and Nip depart without her, and prowled contentedly about the lanes and the shore, in the lengthening shadows, taking here and there a sketch.

But Dickie's strong and long young limbs soon bore her away over the crisp springy turf of Ballard Down, Nip, delighted, running at her heels. They surveyed from giddy heights Old Harry and his wife, standing with their feet in the water, and far, far away in the bay, the *Speck*, looking like a toy vessel. They peered round the point, facing south, over a sheer white wall of chalk, into deep coves of blue water, over which the

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seagulls circled and screamed, and where queer geological "shifts" were to be seen. They noted the great white columns of the Pinnacles, and the entrance to the big cave called "The Parson's Barn," from the Dorset proverb "as big as a parson's barn," which refers probably to the great tithe barns. From the slippery green slopes, where the sheep grazed dizzily, they saw the Downs stretch away to Lulworth Cove, and, below, Swanage Bay, with its fleet of stone boats lading with their freight of London paving stones.

It was growing quite twilight under the Red Cliff ere the three met again by the dingey. But when they were embarked, and as Dickie bent to her oars, she leaned forward to her little friend at the stern. Her eyes were very bright, and her face glowed.

"Kiss me, there's a dear," she said. "I've made up what I'm pleased to call my mind!"

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## CHAPTER X.

### A BRITISH ISLE.

DAYLIGHT was creeping in through the little panes and peeping under the gaps in the awning when Dickie became aware that the *Speck* was rolling at her anchorage. After an interval of ineffectual attempts to maintain a comfortable recumbent position and to sleep on, she gave it up in despair, and looked out to see what the weather was doing. The wind had got up and had evidently shifted a little more easterly. It was a gray, comfortless looking morning with no signs of a fine sunrise. She roused John and then the Wee Widow. There was a hurried consultation, and then, as the weather did not seem promising, it was decided to quit their exposed anchorage at Studland and go into Poole Harbor.

"It's a horrid bore," grumbled the

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Wee Widow with a shiver, "having to start so early again."

"Well, m' lady," called down John from above, "with the wind in this 'ere quarter, and the tide runnin' in till twelve o'clock, we got plenty o' time to git up Poole Harbor, if we don't go in on the zlack water, and it's open lyin' here."

There was nothing for it but to make some tea and get up the sails and the anchor. Poole Bar lies far out beyond the opening to the harbor, and is very shallow at low water. A couple of tacks brought them up the well-buoyed channel to the mouth, extremely narrow, between the North and South Haven, as two sandspits are called. A few minutes' row will take you across the mouth; but Poole Harbor is forty miles round by land.

"I'm sure I recognize the place," cried the Wee Widow, as she stood at the stern. "These low sand dunes, overgrown with reeds and grass on either hand, and the coastguard station and a tumbledown shanty. Yes, I remember now, in that summer number of the *Graphic*—that smuggling story of poor Randolph Caldecott's; I was told at the time he spent

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his last summer in England down here."

"And there's a nice bit, like the Riviera!" exclaimed Dickie, as the wooded end of Branksea Island came into view, pine-feathered, with its red brick Tudor keep and the Gothic turrets standing at the water's edge.

"This is very nice indeed, and so unexpected here, almost out in the channel. John, can't we anchor near the castle?"

John agreed, and in a few moments the *Speck* was moored under the castle quay, within a biscuit-throw of the island. Then everyone turned down to breakfast. The meal concluded, the Wee Widow indulged in a nap to make up for lost time. But Dickie was restless and sat idly on deck, wondering which among the villas that crowned the fir-clad heights to the eastward of the harbor was Lady Mary's, and if Algy were there and had seen them come in.

A quite unexpected sound awoke the Wee Widow. It was nothing less than the melodious jangle of church bells from the island, from Poole, the Venice of England, on its lagoons away at the head of the harbor—and

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from the pine hills to the east. She started up guiltily.

"O Dickie!" she cried, "I'd quite forgotten it was Sunday. We must go to church."

"In this costume?" inquired the latter, glancing at her serge dress, no longer in its pristine freshness, and at her sunburnt sailor hat.

"I don't think it will matter here. We will go ashore to the church on the Island, where the bell comes from among the trees. Let's make haste."

They tied up the dingey at what Mr. Cavendish-Bentinck, the late owner of the Branksea Island, and a great lover of Italy and an art collector, had labeled as the "Piazza di Castello." But the foreign affectation seemed really not unfitting the southern character of this quaint, peaceful spot. The tide lapped but lazily against the landing steps, completely sheltered from the wind now blowing out in the open channel. The little quay was strewn with Italian marbles and pieces of sculpture unloaded there from Italy and awaiting a resting-place in the castle or grounds. There were a few occu-

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pied houses, but many were uninhabited. Thirty years ago the population of Branksea Island was much larger. Colonel Waugh, the then owner, had discovered the valuable china clay pits, containing clay like that used at Meissen for making Dresden china. He reclaimed several hundreds of acres from the mud, built the church and clusters of laborers' cottages at different points of the Island, and added greatly to the castle.

"And he entertained largely, I've heard my father say," remarked the Wee Widow, glancing up at the huge pile.

"There were merry times at Branksea then. But a woeful smash came," she continued, as they picked their way along the quay among mediæval fountains from a Tuscan market-place, or a villa in the Apennines, stone wash basins, perchance from some monastery, statues, tablets, capitals, and torsos. "The china clay was also discovered on the mainland, whence it was easier to export to the Doulton works, and all over the world, and where it is now largely worked. Colonel Waugh and his company dragged down a

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lot of people in their ruin, I believe, and the 'Merry Monarch' of Branksea vanished from the scene, the property going to the hammer on behalf of the creditors."

The church of St. Mary stands on a little knoll in the pine woods across some meadows. The sparse congregation, consisting of a few seafaring men and some school children, had already taken their seats when our *voyageuses* entered the perfect little edifice. While an aged clergyman proceeded with a not very cheerful service, the Wee Widow was able to examine the art treasures it contained. Through the painted modern Gothic windows the light fell on the brass Venetian candelabra in the chancel, on various ornaments of Italian carving, and on the Florentine font in the baptistry in the tower, where hangs what is supposed to be a Murillo, as the custodian informed them after service.

The present owner, when at Branksea, resides in a vicarage near the church; but the Wee Widow, upon giving her name and half-a-crown, was shown over the castle. Colonel Waugh, who faced the stern red

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brick Tudor keep, with mullions, oriels, turrets, and lancets of pseudo-Gothic in white stone, left the place but half finished, and anything more desolate than its appearance could not well be imagined. Since the Wee Widow's visit it has been completed. But the rats scuttled before them as they walked through suites of rooms, where the paper moldered, across the lofty paneled halls, up the broad stairs with the dark carved balustrades, where the panels, bereft of the pictures they had inclosed, looked down upon them as with sightless eyes. It was quite a relief to reach the flat roof of the keep, and to gain a glorious view. It was breezy here, and the white horses were dancing in the bay beyond the sand hills, across which a homeward-bound steamer was making for the Needles, which stood out glaringly against the blue sea. Under the very walls of the castle a small, restless tug was pulling a Norwegian timber vessel up to Poole. A little procession of fishing boats were going down the devious channel on the tide. For all is not gold that glitters. Miles of deceptive mud

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banks intersect this harbor, seemingly so expansive at high water. The long, low chain of sand hills on the spit running out from the eastern cliffs makes Poole Harbor shallow and almost land-locked, instead of rivaling Milford Haven as an anchorage.

Eastward the bold outline of Hengistbury Head, opposite the Needles, melted into the yellow sand cliffs which hide the valley of the Avon and Christchurch Priory, which are capped by the balmy pine woods around Bournemouth. Beyond them was the faint dark outline of the New Forest. Northward, beyond the forest of masts in Poole basin, a heathy country rolled away up to the plains of Stonehenge. Westward, behind the fir-crowned promontory of Arne, capped with its British encampment, the Frome, salmon-laden, flowed from the downs of Dorsetshire. These lay across the midday sky, a magnificent outline, rising at Nine Barrow Down to seven hundred feet, capped with many a tumulus, purple with heather, and forming the backbone of the Isle of Purbeck. At their feet, across creeks and inlets,

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the wandering arms of the great estuary, stretched wild, roadless moors, with lonely meres, the home of wild fowl, and, in a deep cleft, in the center of the range the dismantled keep of Corfe Castle proudly raised its head.

Dickie leant with her arms on the parapet, taking in the wide panorama, but the Wee Widow had whipped out her guidebook.

"You are becoming tiresome with that guidebook, dear," murmured Dickie abstractedly. "I don't want to know about anything, only to enjoy it all. It's such a nice day!"

"Well, I don't know. That depends on how you feel," replied the other. "For the middle of August I should prefer a wind not from the east, and I shouldn't mind a little sun. But listen, Dickie, you absolutely *shall* imbibe a little information. Canute, the king, landed here. Henry II. granted the right of wreckage on Branksea, which was doubtless worth something in those days, to the neighboring Abbey of Cerne. King Henry VIII. fortified it and built the keep, after the dissolution. Queen Bess gave the castle in

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charge of Sir Christopher Hatton, him of dancing fame. He appears to have had perpetual rows with the corporation of Poole respecting the payment of dues by ships entering the harbor, which, of course, objected to pay twice over. Once, he went so far as to fire a broadside into a recalcitrant bark, killing one of the crew, and got a wigging from the Queen, and was dismissed. The Parliamentarians, who held Poole, strengthened Branksea Castle; but in the reign of George II. it was sold and turned into a private mansion, and the Poole people seem to have objected, their defense being gone, and the buccaneers swooping down even upon the shipping in the haven."

"Any more?" inquired Dickie, stifling a yawn.

"No, ungrateful child!" replied the Wee Widow, trying to look up at her in a dignified manner.

"Then let's go down and explore the terrace I see below and the turrets and loggias on the water's edge. It's like a bit of the Mediterranean!"

They prowled in and out of the works and corners of the snug Italian

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gardens. Down a long passage they found a bathing place with quaint steps, the walls set with bits of carving. But the fountains no longer played and the conservatories were empty, and the whole place was a sermon on the motto *sic transit.*

The Wee Widow shivered.

"It gives me the blues. Poor Colonel Waugh! he had better have stayed in India fighting the Sikhs. Come, let's go back to lunch."

But when they reached the Piazza di Castello and were unfastening the dingey, Dickie happened to look over to where the *Speck* swung with the tide.

Another boat lay by the side of the little yacht.

"Methinks we have a caller!" quoth the Wee Widow, with exultation.

Dickie got very red, but said never a word.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### TO CORFE CASTLE.

A STRAW hat with the blue and yellow ribbon of the *Scilly Islanders* was visible over the combing of the cock-pit. As the splash of Dickie's oars became audible, the head appertaining to the hat became visible to the occupants of the dingey, and the hat was lifted from it.

"Oh, here you are again!" exclaimed the Wee Widow. "Crowding up our little boat with those long legs and broad shoulders of yours!" she added maliciously, but with a twinkle in her eyes which belied her words.

"I'm so sorry. I'd unscrew them, or fine them down, if I could. But, you see—I thought—you—said——"

"You had an appointment, in fact," put in the Widow sternly, "and in your anxiety to keep it

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you've not been to church. I see it in your face!" and she glared round at both Algy and Dickie with an intended assumption of severity, which so ill became her sweet little face that both those incorrigible young people burst out laughing.

"*Ingrats!*" she exclaimed. "But I'll be magnanimous. I'll forgive you. Come and have some lunch, Algy. I'll open the tinned calf for you, and, after lunch, we'll go ashore again and explore the island. But let's to work; I'm ravenous. We'll not stand on ceremony about potatoes."

And they all three settled themselves in the cabin, while the Wee Widow dealt out plates and knives and forks, and Algy made himself useful in opening tinned salmon and *pâté de foie gras.*

The Wee Widow often said that it was the funniest luncheon party she ever had. For though she was honestly hungry and made a square meal, the other two merely toyed with their food, and were alternately mum or incoherent by turns. She had to do all the talk and the eating too.

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But it was over at last—the longest repast Algy thought he had ever partaken of. She bade him smoke, and he attempted a cigarette or two, which he let out ere half done, and threw viciously away into the water as they sat all three on deck. Then Dickie was sent to brew coffee, and was discovered in the act of boiling the pot without having put the coffee in, which discovery filled her with shame and confusion.

At last—it would have been cruelty to animals to keep them in suspense any longer—the Wee Widow called to John to bring round the boat, and proposed an adjournment to explore the island.

Landing again at the *duodecimo* "piazza," the three walked solemnly past the castle, the Widow in the middle, through the reclaimed meadowlands, past the church and the vicarage, and dived into a walk in the fir woods, fragrant with a mixture of pine scent and ozone, an undergrowth of rich bracken, with patches of purple heather in the open spaces, a vista of red pine stems, a glimpse of a scudding bunny or a whirring pheasant. The sun had come out

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with the afternoon, and golden bars fell through the pine trees at intervals and gilded the fern. Beneath their feet the soft sand and the crisp pine needles—all around a silence that might be felt.

Then, suddenly, a change. An abrupt dip and they stood in a little amphitheater—a quaint garden such as that in which the poet wooed *Leonora*, or *Lorenzo Jessica*. On three sides banks of rhododendrons, backed by waving pines, an ivy-mantled cottage nestling in the hollow. In the middle a wide-spreading ilex tree, which would not disgrace Himalayan slopes, overshadowing some far-fetched stone fountain with a statue in the center, by which a faun might have sported.

The Wee Widow drew a long breath and walked on slowly, fancying herself once more in the Borghese gardens, till a pheasant whirred across her path, and from a lonely mere in front of her a wild duck rose. She was on English ground, but she was alone. The others had not followed.

Slightly quickening her pace, the Wee Widow crossed the decoy pond

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on a rustic footbridge, and again plunged into the fir woods. The path now led up hill and, to the left, opened grassy slopes trending upward to the old battery, and daisies and buttercups starred the turf, presided over by a life-size white marble figure in a toga. Before her, between the bare trunks of the giants of the waste and the gray green of the silver birches, appeared patches of blue sea and purple moor, in vivid contrast to the green bracken. It was indeed Shelley's

> pine forest
> That skirts the ocean's foam.

The path came to an abrupt termination at a cliff of yellow sandstone, and amid the fir trees one could see the sea. On the green brink of the declivity four rusty old cannon lay moldering among the fern. The Wee Widow approached and examined them. The Tudor rose was plainly visible upon their barrels. Doubtless this was Sir Christopher's unlucky battery. *Sic transit*, again.

The Wee Widow flung herself on the grass beside them. The variable sunlight flickered through the

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branches, and a delicious moan of the sea came up from the harbor mouth. A heron from Arne Creek, away among the moors, slowly flapped his awkward flight across the water. She closed her eyes. The rustle of the pine trees, that mimicry of the ocean, mixed vaguely with the real murmur at the bar. How long she sat there she did not know. Remember, she had been up since five, and the Virgin Queen's ordnance made no uncomfortable resting-place for her little golden head.

But her arousing was sudden. Hurried steps came up, the sward behind, a tall figure flung itself down by her side and kissed her awake. The Widow sprang up, alert and ashamed to be caught napping, to find both hands seized by Algy; for the moment all his English *mauvaise honte* vanished.

"Will you let me thank you?"

While Dickie, catching her from behind and striving ineffectually to bury her blushing face on the Wee Widow's shoulder, added:

"*We* thank you! *We* thank you!"

. . . . .

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Eventually she persuaded them to come back on board to tea, and then, when the evening shadows were lengthening, Algy rowed them across the now fast filling harbor to dinner at Lady Mary's villa among the pine woods. But as this last has nothing whatever to do with the cruise of the *Speck*, and was just like any similar performance on dry land, saving the introduction of Dickie as daughter-in-law elect, it shall not be enlarged upon here. They had a long tramp back, however, between ten and eleven, and down the sand spit, a good mile and a half, and across in a dingey from the coast-guard station at South Haven to the yacht. But I don't think Algy and Dickie found it long, they walked so slowly behind.

Next day the *Speck* was again on the move, and she now bore a most merry party intent on a day's outing up the sinuous channels of Poole Harbor, and, if possible, on "doing" Corfe Castle. There was Algy's Eton brother Jack, a smaller copy of himself, home for the holidays, and just wildly delighted with the idea of a sail. There was Madge, the

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little sister in short frocks, let loose by Fraülein for the day; and Irene, the elder sister, presented but last season, and still very dignified and much impressed with the fact of being "grown-up." Last but not least there was Algy's great "pal," little Ruffleby of the "Scilly Islanders," like him on leave from Portsmouth for ten days, a most amusing little man, full of good stories.

Somehow or other they packed into the little *Speck*, how, the Wee Widow never quite knew, except that Dickie and Algy, in the most self-denying manner, kindly left room for the others on deck by sequestering themselves in the little cabin, where they devoted themselves first to cooking the lunch and then to washing up, in the noblest manner. Jack, in the intervals of teasing Nip, was perpetually shouting down to them that they were losing a "jolly sail" or a splendid view; but they did not seem to care in the least, and schoolboys have no perception.

An early start was made. The day was sunny and promising, and the wind had gone back to the north, so was just right for the course they

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contemplated. They got up all sail, the Wee Widow took the helm and endeavored to keep order among the noisy, laughing group which surrounded her on the deck. The tide was on the flow, but the first part of the course was slow, for they tacked up the wide ship channel east under the pine woods of Branksea Island. At the corner of the island they left this main channel leading to Poole quay and ran along under the north side of the island. This is the hilly side, where sand cliffs slope down to the water, fir-crowned. To the north lay the forest of masts in Poole basin and the deep ship channel winding away between the moors up the Frome to Wareham. The tide was coming in fast, oozy mud flats were covering every moment, the wind was fresh, and the *Speck*, close hauled, made very fair way.

Past the western end of Branksea two other islands were uncovered—Furzy and Green Islands; lonely green sand cliffs rising out of a sea of mud, and uninhabited. The channel wound about so much that it was not without difficulty that the Wee Widow managed to keep on the right

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side of the various "booms," as the sticks are called which mark it, and to take the *Speck* safely up to Shifnal Point, a promontory under the Arne tumulus, where the now fast narrowing water-way turned sharp to the south, past Long and Round Island, and then divided again, one arm—or "lake" as the local term is—leading to the quay and clay-shed at Middlebere, and the other southward to the ferry at Wych Farm. They chose this latter route as reaching the nearest point to Corfe Castle. But of Neas Point, "thus far shall thou go and no further," was the case with the *Speck*, for a mere narrow rivulet of water ran up into a pretty wooded valley at Wych.

The widow heaved a long sigh as John let down the mainsail, assisted by Jack (who tried to be of much use on board and proved greatly in the way), and glanced at her faithful "crew."

"It's enough to turn one's hair gray!" she exclaimed. "I didn't think we'd have got up!"

"You done *very* well, m' lady," replied the latter sententiously.

Algy and Dickie emerged from

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the cabin, followed by Nip, who had refuged thither from Jack. A chorus of voices first inquired how ever they were going to get ashore, for certainly their surroundings did look unpromising, and then there followed a demand for lunch.

"The dingey won't hold everyone. Some must lunch, while some row up to Wych Ferry."

"And how about lunch for those who land?" inquired Master Jack, somewhat lugubriously, looking up from tying the tiller to the crutches with knots that vexed John's sailor soul within him.

"Oh, Alg and Dickie can go first and take a munch of the bread and cheese and k——," cried Miss Madge, in a manner which made her elder brother feel inclined to box her ears. But he refrained, and contented himself with pushing her hat over her eyes.

"Well, we'll all lunch here together. There's plenty of time," remarked the Widow, standing up on the counter to give herself more dignity and a greater air of command over her unruly shipload. "We've plenty of time to get down before the tide

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turns again. When does it turn, John?"

"'Bout three, m' lady."

So they all fell to, and when they had eaten they were rowed up in two parties by the faithful John.

"What a desolate country it is, John!" remarked the Wee Widow, as she voyaged up the narrow inlet in the last boat-load. "Like a bit of some out-of-the-way part of Scotland. Fancy living at Wych Farm," she added, as the roof of the lonely homestead rose into view south under the sand hills.

"T'warn't so lonesome down here in my feyther's time, I've 'eerd tell," remarked John, who was a Swanage man from across Ballard Down.

"What, with the smuggling, I suppose?"

"No, m' lady, 'twarnt the zmuggling, though there were enow o' that, too. 'Twer' the Marblers."

"The what?" asked a young voice parenthetically.

"The Marblers," enlightened the Wee Widow, "the stone-workers, the quarrymen, who work all round Swanage in the quarries—the Purbeck marble in St. Paul's Cathedral,

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remember. Well, John, and what about the Marblers?"

"They used to come down to Owers—over yonder there across the heath is Owers Bay, oppo*site* to Green Island—and finish up the day on Marblers' Day."

"Ah, yes! their great day. What did they do?"

"They had a procession fust, m' lady," John continued, in the intervals of glancing back over his shoulder to see that he was not running ashore, "right through the streets o' Corfe, the newly 'lected quarryman (you must be *born* a quarryman, m' lady, you can't become one) marchin' at their head, and a band of music. They had queer priveledges like—the new quarrymen, m' lady, begging your pardin—" and John stifled a grin in his red beard.

"Let us hear!"

"They might kiss any gals they come across on the march, m' lady."

Miss Madge giggled.

"And then they come down to Owers and played football, and the last-married quarryman had to give the football and a cake."

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"Very interesting," murmured the Widow. "Quite like an old mediæval guild!" But the comparison was lost upon her hearers.

In an oozy meadow by the ferry they all collected, and then it was a "go-as-you please" across country, the most direct road to Corfe, for path there was none. The gaunt keep of the Banks fortress, lying in the nick in the downs, was the only and the sufficient guide. It was a good four miles' tramp over rough ground, but at last they reached the little quondam royal borough, nestling under the ruined walls of the castle.

"Oh! it's dreadfully full of English history," gasped Madge, as memories of Elfrida, King John, Stephen and Maude, Edward II., taken thence to Berkeley to be murdered, and the Civil Wars, with the Parliamentarians melting the lead on the church tower to shoot against it in vain, all crowded in upon her as the Wee Widow held forth among the ruins, standing in the Queen's Hall or looking up at the Buttevant Tower.

They explored the site of Edmund

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the Martyr's murder—the great gateway; Jack would fain have made good the book on the Wareham side of the mound, where the unfortunate monarch's body was found. But time and tide wait for no man. They wended their way back to Wych, with the sun coming out at last behind the encampment on Arne Hill. The flow had spread all over the mud flats, adding immeasurably to the scenery. It bathed the pine woods and the sand hills, and the harbor looked vast indeed.

The wind was sinking with the sun. But the tide served, and the *Speck* began to retrace her devious route homeward. Dickie, after she had brewed tea and cut bread and butter in the cabin, assisted by Algy, took the helm.

It seemed further going home than coming. It always does, except in the case of the hill of life, when *facilis descensus est.* The August evening had closed in. Pale stars were coming out in the deep blue sky, and the afterglow had faded in the west as they literally floated down on the tide in a placid sea, the mainsail hardly filled, and the *Speck* once

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more cast anchor under Branksea Castle. The young people had sung themselves hoarse with every imaginable catch and chorus, beguiling the weary route, and were now only eager on dinner.

But deep down in the hearts both of Dickie and the Wee Widow there was just a little ache. For it was their last sail in the *Speck*.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### L'ENVOI.

THE Wee Widow sat alone in the cabin. Dickie and her young man, chaperoned by all the brothers and sisters and little Ruffleby, had gone ashore, ostensibly bound on making the circle of Branksea Island on foot, as they had nearly made it on water the day before. Their merry voices had died away across the strip of water which separated the *Speck* from the castle quay, and the yacht seemed very quiet. John, his mistress had sent up to Poole with some telegrams. She had the little vessel all to herself, and it rocked slightly on the stream.

The Wee Widow was supposed to be writing letters. She had many to answer and many plans to make, now

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arrears of posts had fallen upon her, and this delightful cruise was at an end. There were invitations for her to various Scotch lodges and sundry English country places, now that the country house season was fairly beginning. She was a little woman with hosts of friends, and she clearly foresaw the next six months mapped out in paying visits till such time as the biting English spring commences, and the world begins to think of Cairo or Algiers. In the interim, if any should occur, there was always her own charming little house in Green Street ready for her at any moment. It was a programme many women would have given their eyes for—complete liberty and independence, and plenty of means to do it on. Yet, apparently, instead of enjoying the prospect, the Wee Widow lay back in a nest she had made for herself of pale blue silk Liberty cushions in one corner of the bunk, her pen idle in her hand, and dreamily watched the red brick, white-mullioned angle of the castle, visible through the open door of the cabin.

"Such taste," she said to herself peevishly. "Nineteenth century

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Gothic on the Elizabethan brick! It's enough to make Sir Christopher Hatton dance in his grave. Heighho!"

The sigh was real and audible enough, but I am not sure that it was caused by the architectural follies of the late Colonel Waugh, which, art-lover though the Wee Widow was, could hardly have contributed to the sad and rather wistful look which shadowed her blue eyes.

About this time there came a rather sudden and decided rolling of the *Speck*. The day was a very still calm, gray one, and the Wee Widow had arranged all her writing paraphernalia withont regard to any such contingency. She put out a hand to steady the inkpot.

"The wind must be getting up. What a bore! Yet I believe we're all right here for to-night, and then to-morrow it doesn't matter—nothing matters—never no more—heighho!" She was incoherent, gloomy.

The end of the castle, in its frame of mahogany, oscillated again and again with great regularity, revealing more of its mixed beauties. The Widow protected a half-full milk jug Dickie had left about, and saved a

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wineglass from imminent destruction. Then the sound of the dipping of oars fell upon her ear.

"It can't be them—there is no noise," she soliloquized ungrammatically. "It must be John. How quick he's been! And my letters not half ready."

She began to write hastily, dating her letters, and for the last time, "Yawl *Speck*," when a boat gently approached the yacht, and was warded off it by a careful hand, while a man's head in a yachting cap craned over into the cock-pit and peeped into the cabin.

"Oh!" the Wee Widow gasped.

"I beg your pardon; did I frighten you? I thought the *Speck* deserted. No, don't move, you look too snug. I'll just tie up the boat and come in."

A moment later the figure of Skipper descended into the cock-pit, and, sitting down on the little step leading into the cabin, surveyed the small person among the pale blue cushions with a smile which had something of quiet, tender, and gray in it, like the day. She was too astonished at the apparition to move.

"Are you real?" she inquired.

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"Shake hands and try. It's customary in society on meeting friends, too."

The Wee Widow held out a little hand, rather brown with the occupations of the last week, and it lingered in the skipper's larger and tawnier paw somewhat longer than *is* customary in society.

"How did you come? Did you fly?" she repeated, still bewildered.

"No; per steam yacht *Bulldog*, now lying a biscuit's throw off."

"Then it was *you* nearly upset my inkpot. You should tell people when you are going to do such things."

"Sorry. And how are you—I needn't ask. And Mademoiselle and her Scilly Islander?"

"Both quite daft and gone ashore, and I'm supposed to be writing letters and settling up."

"Been on the mud again?"

She shot a scornful glance at him.

"I took the boat myself—*my own little self*—up the Wych channel yesterday on the flow. There!"

"The which has never been done before—I apologize, doubly. And so you are really off to-morrow?"

"Yes, indeed, I'm sorry to say.

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Cruising without Algy has no longer any charms for Dickie, besides which we've no room for that long-legged young man on board, even if engaged couples were not a bore."

"They are—are they?"

"To everyone but themselves. So Dickie is going to stay a little with Lady Mary, and I'm thinking of running up to town after some gowns for Scotland. But I am *so* sorry to go. We *have* enjoyed ourselves—the dear little *Speck*. I'm quite sorry to give her up; indeed I am."

And again the wistful little look came into the blue eyes. But she lowered them before the Skipper's glance and drew hieroglyphics on the half-commenced letter on her knee. He abruptly left his seat on the step, and sat down beside her on the bunk.

There was a short silence, broken only by a thud of the dingey against the side of the yacht. The Skipper was looking down upon her intently.

"Why *should* you give her up?" he asked, in a low voice, possessing himself unresisted of the little hand again.

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"Why ?" She looked up at him half bewildered.

"But you'll have to take *me* along with her," he added, with a smile twinkling about his eyes and mouth.

"I don't mind much if I do," she faltered, letting him draw her head down on his shoulder.

And that was the end of the last cruise of the Wee *Widow*.

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